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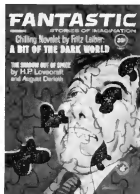
SF Profile:
THEODORE
STURGEON



A. B. SCHMEIKER

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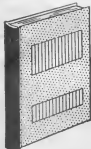


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SHORT STORIES

THIRD STAGE

- By Poul Anderson 8
MISSIONARIES FROM THE SKY (Classic Reprint)
By Stanton A. Coblenz 96
AND IT WAS GOOD
By A. Early 118
RECIDIVISM PREFERRED
By John Jakes 125

SERIAL

PAWN OF THE BLACK FLEET

- By Mark Clifton 40
(Conclusion)

SF PROFILE

THEODORE STURGEON: NO MORE THAN HUMAN

- By Sam Moskowitz 27

FEATURES

- EDITORIAL 6
THE SPECTROSCOPE 137
... OR SO YOU SAY 141
COMING NEXT MONTH 144

Cover: ALEX SCHOMBURG

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EDITORIAL

AS I write this, the radioactive clouds from the 50-megaton bomb exploded by the Soviets are circling just north of us. Within a few weeks from the time you read this, the early spring rains will begin washing down out of the sky the strontium-90 and the other deadly debris. It is appropriate, therefore, to muse upon a question raised recently by the anthropologist William Howells.

"Supposing," he wrote, "in a moment of idiot progress we really killed ourselves off. Would *Homo* rise again?" According to Dr. Howells, the chances are slim, if that. The vessels which carried the seed of man forward through the millennia of evolution are gone, or as good as gone. "Man," said Howells, "has competed them into the grave." Evolution, in other words, has already (and forever) passed the turning points in the long road that led to humanity.

Howells ticks off bluntly the chances of other species to succeed man as the inheritor of

earth. The apes, he holds, are not only too specialized, but "too busy looking for fruit in the forest to turn to freer use of hands." Monkeys might do the trick if "something made it worthwhile for a species to stand up." But monkeys have not found any such motivation for rising to the occasion in about 35 million years. There is not much reason to suspect they will now. And, according to Howells, most of the other mammals are too deeply committed to their heredity and environment to try to become anything else.

The scientist's candidate for the "best bet" to begin the long evolutionary trail again is the tiny tree shrew; and for it to triumph, says Howells, "the world would have to be swept clean of the kind of competition which might overwhelm it on the way up."

Are there, in this mordant viewpoint, any morals for mankind? I offer three suggestions.

(Continued on page 124)

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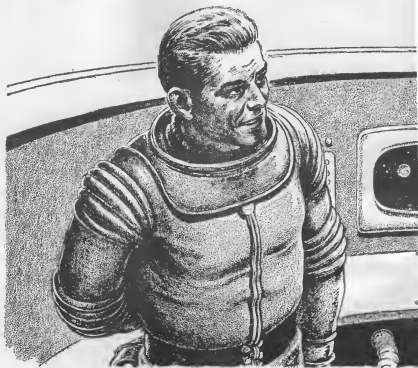
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Many years ago Frank R. Stockton wrote a famous story called "The Lady and The Tiger." With the same fiendish cleverness, Poul Anderson creates a tale that we think, sf fans will talk about and argue over for years to come—a tale of real people, of life and death, of man's inhumanity (and humanity) to man.



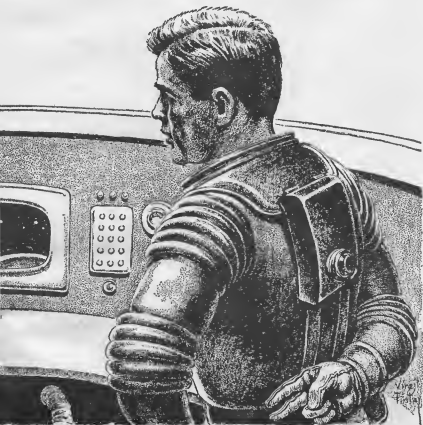
NOT long after sunset, a storm far out to sea veered in a direction the Weather Bureau computers had called improbable. By

midnight there was rain over Cape Canaveral and Buckler, roused from his bed, said the shot would likely have to be post-

THIRD STAGE

By POUL ANDERSON

Illustrated by FINLAY



poned. But the rain soon slacked off and technical crews beneath the arc lights could find no harm done their bird. At dawn there

was only an overcast, beneath which a muggy breeze came sighing through the gantrys and across the field. The final deci-

sion, whether to abort or go ahead, was left to the men who must actually ride the rocket. "Why on earth shouldn't we take her?" Swanberg shrugged. "Or off earth, for that matter." Holt nodded, a quick jerky movement: "Yeah, think'a fifty million women who might have to watch Enis Preston today, if we aren't on the TV."

When Swanberg noticed a passing thought, he seldom let it go in a hurry. He was a large, squinting, tow-headed man with a friendly slow voice. As they left the briefing room and started toward the rocket, he went back to Holt's remark. "Do you really think this flight is such a big production, Jim?"

"Sure." His companion made a wide gesture at buildings, machines, and bare concrete. "Didn't you know? We're clean-limbed American boys bound forth to Ride Out The Lethal Space Storms."

"But, uh, it isn't that interesting. Just a routine orbital flight. Not as if we were the first men around the moon, or even the first Americans—"

"But we are the first men of any stripe, chum, to head into the Van Allen belt and stay a while. Haven't you watched *TV-Time*? Don't you know how far the new radiation screen puts us ahead of those Russian nogoodniks?" Holt shifted his helmet to

the other arm. "No, I guess you're uninformed, Bill. All you ever did was help develop the gadget. Probably spent your spare time with a book or some such anachronism. Downright subversive, I calls you."

Swanberg chuckled. He didn't like rapid-fire New York accents; the taut, status-scrabbling, publicity-wise types who infested the space project got on his nerves; but he made an exception for Holt. "Really, though," he said, "I don't get the reason for the ballyhoo. This hop is nothing but the last test of a long series. If the news services want something significant to report, why don't they do a piece on . . . oh, the ion feedback work, or—"

Holt spat. "You misunderstand, Bill. You think the news programs are to enlighten the people. Actually, they're to sell cigarettes."

"Bitter today, aren't you?"

"Me? Christ, no. What have I got to be bitter about? A laugh a minute, every time I lift up mine eyes unto the hills, whence cometh the video transmission. You're the soured old gaffer, not me."

"Could be." Swanberg sighed. He made no secret of wanting to go back to Idaho, where he spent every vacation as it was, tramping the mountains and the forests. But how do you get a job re-

motely comparable—in interest and importance; to hell with pay—that far from anyplace? When he looked at the rocket where it stood waiting, tower high, iceberg massive, but with speed and grace, *upwardness*, built into every flowing line, he forgot climate and office politics and his dreary little tract house and the desperate gaiety of Laura's farewell. There was only the bird, about to fly.

HOLT, brisk even in the blue spacesuit, reached the pad first. He gave his helmet to one of the technicians, who slipped it over his head and made it fast. All the techs were enlisted men this morning, Swanberg noticed. Though civilians like Holt and himself had been infiltrating the project in ever greater numbers since the organizational shakeup of '63, the Pentagon was fighting a valiant rearguard action. At that, he'd rather have generals breathing down his neck than the reporters who'd invaded his privacy during the past few days. Swanberg was by nature an obliging soul, but after a while he began to resent being told what pose to assume on his own patio. . . . The helmet went on him too. He stared through clear polydene at a last-minute bustle which had become muffled and vague in his ears.

"How's that, sir?" asked a

voice in the 'phone. "Comfortable?"

"Fine." Swanberg went almost absent-mindedly through the check routines. Not until he was rising in the cage with Holt, seeing the rocket's clifflike immensity slide past him, monster first stage, lanceolate second stage, and the capsule in the nose which would carry him around the world and through the radiation zone and back, not until then did he fully realize that the talking and planning and trying and failing and starting over again were likewise past, that today he personally was going up.

He'd done so before, of course: nowhere near as often as Holt, the test pilot; but several times, in connection with trying out some electronic development in which he had had a part. Not even a night along the upper Kootenai was as beautiful as the night above this gray heaven. He had envied the *voyageurs* who first saw the loneliness of the high West, until he became one of today's *voyageurs*—if only his journeys could be often-er! He pulled his mind back to practicalities, squeezed through the capsule airlock after Holt and strapped himself into his adjoining seat. Though the Aeolus three-stager was by now the most reliable workhorse in the whole American space program,

there would be a dull couple of hours to go through, checking and testing, before blastoff.

He threw a glance at Holt. The pilot's dark sharp features were misted. Sweat? Swanberg felt a slight shock. When he listened closely, he detected a note of shrillness in Holt's responses on the intercom. But Holt couldn't be scared; he wouldn't do this, time after time after time, if he was scared; why, merely thinking of his responsibilities, his own wife and kids, would—High-strung, that was it. Of course. Swanberg tried to relax and concentrate on his own job.

STAGE Two dropped on schedule. "A-OK," said the voice from above. There was no need; telemetered instruments had registered the fact clearly enough in the control blockhouse. But Tom Zellman was glad of the words. They were a much needed dramatic touch. Blastoff had been great, as always, vapor clouds and immense boneshaking roar and sudden, accelerating climb of the giant. But since then there had been little to see down here. He had had his cameramen pan in on the faces of the ground crew—visible through a thick glass panel between their work space and the TV booth—until he felt his audience was sick of it. His roving reporters elsewhere on the

base had gotten nothing interesting from the scientists. The interviews amounted to a bunch of young crewcuts and old Herr Doktors saying yes, we sent men on the final test of the radiation screen, but not to check on the screen itself; our unmanned shots gave us enough such data; only because man is the one instrument whose observations are not limited to those for which someone designed him. What kind of show was that? Especially when the Dodgers-White Sox game would soon start on another network.

Zellman signalled for the view to cut back to him. He beamed and said resonantly: "A-OK. Everything's fine up there, Laura Swanberg, Jane Holt, and all your kids. Everything's fine, Mr. and Mrs. America." He deepened his tone. "Cold thousands of miles above the green fields of their native land, two young men are entering the deadly radiation current which boils eternally around our planet. Trusting their lives to an invisible shield of pulsed magnetic energies—and to God," he remembered to add, "they are going to circle the globe for ten lonely hours. If they succeed . . . if they come home again unharmed to their loved ones . . . then the way is open for Americans to explore the Solar System, unafraid of those lethal blasts from the sun

which—" He saw the Number Two cameraman holding his nose and barely suppressed a scowl. That smart aleck would hear from Tom Zellman after this was over. "—which have so long limited the time and places our ships could venture beyond the atmosphere." Well, maybe the corn syrup was getting too thick at that. Zellman flipped a switch and projected a still pic onto a screen for transmission.

IT WAS a cutaway view of a standard Aeolus third stage. Because a good deal of the innards had still been secret when the drawing was made, the artist had relied considerably on his imagination. Joe Blow wouldn't know the difference anyway. The capsule was shown blasting with its spin jets as well as the main rocket motor. Actually, Zellman supposed, those small swiveling nozzles were only to aim it in the right direction. The real thrust would come from the stern jet. And would hardly be used at the present time. Maybe a bit of push here and there, to get Stage Three into precisely the correct orbit. But generally speaking, Stage Two did that job. The main task of the Stage Three motor was to bring the capsule down again—to brake orbital velocity until the ship spiraled into atmosphere and its parachute could take over.

THIRD STAGE

HOWEVER, the clip was a good dramatic pic. Zellman left his desk and pointed at the two human figures. "That's Jimmy Holt piloting the spaceship. The ground crew is standing alertly by, ready to take over if he needs help. A giant computer clicks madly" (or does it whirr, or flash lights, or what?) "digesting the information sent down by radio instruments. Powerful remote-control impulses are sent back, guiding, helping. But in the last analysis, the pilot controls the ship. How do you like that, Pete and Hughie? That's your dad there, riding that rocket like a cowboy rides a bronco. Next to him Billy Swanberg peers at the radiation shield meters. If the screen should fail—But no, little Julie, that isn't going to happen. Your father is going to come back to you, safe and sound—"

"*Preparing to assume final orbit,*" said the dry voice. There went a hissing and crackling undertone of static.

"That was Jimmy Holt," explained Zellman. "Jimmy Holt, preparing for the last delicate touch of jets that will throw him into the heart of the densest Van Allen belt." He glanced at the clock. The damn capsule ought to be stabilized or whatever you called it in another few minutes. Then he could turn the program over to Harry while he got

lunch. He'd missed breakfast and his belly was growling. Good Lord! Suppose the sound mikes picked that up?

The idea worried him so much that for a while, a whole thirty or forty seconds, the fact didn't register on him, what it meant, Holt speaking again: "The main jet doesn't respond. The goddam thing won't fire. What's gone wrong?"

THE vision scope showed Earth like a globe of itself, so enormous against blackness that Holt's eyes joined his middle ear canals in making weightlessness appear to be a meteor's fall. Any minute now, any second, they'd hit the ground and spatter. . . . He shook off the illusion. *Stop that, you schnook. You've been orbital often enough to know better. I wish to God we were headed down. No, we're stuck in the sky like Mohammed's coffin. Like half a dozen other dead guys in capsules that never returned, still whirling around the world. I wonder if we'll see one of 'em.*

He pulled his gaze from the scope. Bill Swanberg could sit for hours mooning over how pretty Earth was. Holt had other business on hand. He'd long ago stopped getting any kicks from the scenery. (Oh, no denying it had beauty, the vast round ball, softly blue, banded with white

clouds, blazoned with green and dusky continents . . . crowned by uncountably many stars, guarded by the Horned Goddess herself . . . but the cabin here wasn't big enough to swing a kitten, it clicked and whickered, ventilators blew continuous gusts in your face, the air stank of oil and man, and you really had no time to look at anything but the meters.) He had never been glamor-struck by the spaceships anyhow. When routine psychophysical exams showed he had a natural aptitude for piloting, he'd snapped at the offer from Canaveral, because that was an even quicker route to executive rank than the engineering in which he had trained. A pilot who knew his way around people and watched his chances could step into some very fat jobs after a few years.

If he lived that long, of course.

Holt glanced at Swanberg. Unhelmeted, the electronics man's broad freckled face glittered with sweat. Little droplets broke off and floated in the air currents. But he proceeded doggedly with his instrumental checks. From time to time he told Base his results, in a perfectly cool tone. Bill was a good joe, Holt thought. The phrase struck him funny. He started to laugh, but stopped himself in time.

"That's about everything," Swanberg finished.

"You're getting near our horizon," said the man down at Canaveral. Static hissed and sputtered around his words. "I think we can figure out what your trouble is, though, before you're gone from line of sight."

"Hope so," Swanberg drawled. "Hate to wait out another half orbit or thereabouts, wondering whether it's gremlins or trolls." He hesitated. "Standing by, then," he said. "Over and out." He cut off the transmitter.

TRAVELING eastward at miles per second, the capsule was once again over the night side. Earth's disc had become a crescent, its darkness edged with sunlight and tinged by moonlight. Had the tracking stations in that hemisphere been prepared, continuous contact would have been maintained. But they weren't. No one had expected this to be anything but a milk run.

"How's the rad screen holding out?" Holt asked, to drown the machinery noises. His throat felt caught between cold fingers.

"Fine," Swanberg said. "Hardly an electron more is getting through than 'ud get through half an Earth atmosphere."

Suddenly his calm was intolerable. Holt pounded the control panel with his fist, softly and repeatedly. His thin body rebounded in the harness. "What's gone

wrong?" he groaned. "Why won't the main jet fire?" In a rush of resentment: "Goddam Rube Goldberg monstrosity. Five million things to go haywire. Why can't they design 'em simple and right?"

"They're working on it," said Swanberg. "But a spaceship has a lot of separate functions to perform, you know. You and I are Rube Goldberg monstrosities too. It doesn't take much to make us stop functioning—one blood clot can do it."

"Yeah, yeah. I guess so." Holt tensed his tongue to spit, but recalled where he was. "So much for that God guff," he said. "I can't believe in a God who's that lousy an engineer."

"I daresay a molecule of fuel could make a similar objection as it burns," Swanberg answered. "No religion worth a hoot ever promised us happiness. We do get a fighting chance, though. Does a man really want more?"

"This one does," Holt said. "I want to get back where I belong."

"Sure," Swanberg said. "Don't misunderstand me, Jim." A grin stretched his mouth, less a smile than a baring of teeth. "I'm scared worse than you are."

"Wanna bet?"

SILENCE closed in again. Holt tried frantically to think of

something to say that wouldn't sound too stupid. Speculation on what the trouble with the rocket was . . . but that was being computed, not guessed at, down on Base, where they had not only the data Swanberg sent but information telemetered from the entire ship. . . . Continue the God argument? No, he and Bill had left their sophomore years behind them. . . . Sentimental reminiscences about wives and kids? Cannonballs! Laura and Janie—oh, Janie gal—

"Canaveral to Aeolus. Canaveral to Aeolus."

The voice was dim, wavering across the scale, nearly drowned in hoots and squeals and buzzes. So fierce was the ionic current beyond this hull that a tight, hard-driven FM beam could barely get through. But Swanberg leaped in his chair to switch on the transmitter. Holt beat him to it.

"Do you receive me, Aeolus? Cana—"

"Aeolus to Canaveral," Holt rattled through a mouth full of cotton and pepper. "We read you. What's the word?"

The voice dropped formalities. It shook. "We've identified your trouble. I'm afraid—the—Your main discharge valve is stuck. Probably a thin seal of ice, due to condensation last night when the air was so damp. A, a little water vapor in that cranny—you

know?—normally the rocket exhaust would flush it out, but in this case—"

"Get to the point!" Holt screamed, for the voice was fading away every second. "What do we do?"

"Can't cut out the safety circuits and blow the valve open with a minimal jet," came the remnant of answer. "Ordinarily you could, but—" Static sheeted.

"I know that," Swanberg barked. "The rad screen's in the same hookup, to save weight. We'd fry. I helped install the blinking thing, you! What *can* we do?"

A gulp: "Someone . . . got to go out the airlock . . . crawl around behind, into the tube, bust the ice loose by hand—one of you—" Then there was only the seething.

Holt stared at a meter face for an indefinite while. Eventually he glanced at Swanberg. The big man was finishing a slide rule calculation.

"I suppose you know the magnetic deflection effect drops off on a steep inverse square curve," Swanberg said without tone. "If a guy went outside here in the middle of the Van Allen, even hugging the hull, he'd get a lethal dose in something like ten minutes. How long would he need to free the valve and get back inside?"

"Half an hour, at least," Holt

heard himself answer. "It's a clumsy business, working in free space."

They fell silent again.

TOM Zellman looked straight into the pickup. As soon as the news arrived, he had ducked out to change his sports shirt—although it was his trade mark—for a dark suit and sincere tie. Now he spoke in measured cadence.

"You have just seen an interview with General Buckler, commander of Cape Canaveral Base, the man on whose shoulders has fallen the agonizing responsibility of choosing who shall live and who shall die," he said. "General Buckler did not, of course, have time to explain the situation in detail." (General Buckler, in point of fact, had retreated so far into his military shell that getting a dozen words from him had been like milking a constipated cow. Hysterical reaction; this kind of publicity could crumple a career. But Zellman would cover for him: such IOU's were always collectible later.) "So let me try, Mr. and Mrs. America. You want to know what faces your boys out there. Savage cold, blazing heat, whizzing meteorites, weightlessness, raw vacuum . . . and now the deadly, blasting radiation of the charged particle zone in which they are trapped.

"Because one valve has stuck, the main jet on their capsule won't fire. The side jets are only for steering. Their small separate motors can't burn long enough to bring the capsule down out of orbit. It won't be hard to get that vital part unstuck. Half an hour or less, and the third stage rocket is free to come home again. But—that half hour must be spent outside the hull. The force screen that protects Billy and Jimmy from the radiation, *inside* the cabin, cannot protect the man who goes out. He will get such a searing blast through his spacesuit that no medical science can save him. In a few days he will be dead. But his comrade" (oops!) "his friend will come down to Earth unharmed." Zellman dropped into the upper bass register. "Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend."

THE teleboard behind the cameras had been forming words for some seconds. Zellman crooked a finger beneath his desk. A boy came running and handed him a sheet of paper. Zellman unfolded it and spent thirty seconds letting emotions play across his face. Then he lowered the paper—carefully, so the audience couldn't see it was blank—and raised the pitch and speed of his delivery.

"Flash! Three more tracking

stations have locked onto the capsule. This means that continuous two-way contact can be maintained. Billy and Jimmy can't see us, but our voices, our prayers, can come to them. By special arrangement, this network will have the honor of preparing the unofficial messages they can now receive. Do you hear me, Jimmy and Billy? You are not alone. One hundred and ninety million of your fellow Americans are with you, fighting, suffering, praying with you." The teleboard wrote **STANDING BY WITH JANIE STILL CAN'T GET LAURIE**. "But you don't want to hear me talk," Zellman said, venturing a gallant smile. "We have contacted Jimmy's wife, Janie Holt, and his four children, Pete, Hughie, Susie, and little Gail. The engineer is signalling me that we can go on the air, Jimmy,—direct from your own home to you. Do you hear me?"

Faintly, scratchily, as if it were a midge caught somewhere inside the blackness of a telephone receiver, there came: "Holt speaking. I read you." The engineer scowled and twiddled knobs in his cage. The sound wasn't going onto the TV frequencies very well. But his assistant nodded, and a monitor unit came to life beside Zellman's desk. The visual transmission across the country would be split-screen, one side showing

himself in the blockhouse TV booth on Base, the other side showing the scene in the monitor: Holt's family in their house downtown.

Jane Holt was small and dark like her husband. The plain black dress showed her figure to advantage, and the makeup man had done a good job on her and the kids. They were well posed too, the boys on either side of her chair, the girl at her knee and the baby in her arms.

"Hello, Janie," said Zellman with his Undertaker's Special smile.

"Hello . . . Tom." He wished she wouldn't speak quite so thinly.

"In a minute, Janie, we'll put you through to your Jimmy. But first, wouldn't you like to say a word to the rest of your family? Your family and his—the great, warm, wonderful family of America, hanging on the edge of their television screens, hoping, loving, and praying. Their hearts are with you at this moment. Believe me, they are; I know those wonderful people so well. Just a word, Janie?"

Whoever had set up the idiot board behind the camera in her place knew his job; her eyes seemed to look straight from the screen, into the viewer's. There hadn't been time to rehearse her, so her delivery was rather mechanical—

"—Thank you so much, each and every one of you. I, I know how much Jimmy thanks you too—"

—but on the whole, Zellman thought, she was effective. Harry had always been able to whip out a fast script with zing in it.

The teleboard said STILL CAN'T GET LAURIE STOP DOORS LOCKED AND CURTAINS DRAWN STOP DOESN'T ANSWER PHONE STOP HODGKINS AND BURR CAMPING ON HER PORCH WITH OTHER NETWORKS MEN AND REPORTERS.

"—God's will be done. But oh, we do hope Jimmy comes back safe!"

HAVING finished, Jane sat at a loss. Her kids stared woodenly into the camera, and the baby started to cry. Zellman said hastily, "Thank you, Janie. Have you been in touch with Laurie Swanberg yet? You know her well, don't you?"

"Yes. No, I mean, I haven't heard from her. I, I tried to phone . . . we ought to be together, oughtn't we? . . . but—" Jane drew a deep breath and flung out: "She's probably off by herself, with her *two* children."

"I'll switch you over to your husband now," Zellman said before a crisis was precipitated.

"Jimmybuck," Jane said like a sleepwalker.

"Hi, kid," said the voice torn by static.

"How . . . how are you?"

"Okay so far. Sweating out the Old Man's decision."

"Jimmy—come back. Tell your daddy to come back." Hughie began to blubber. "We need you so."

"Hey, wait—" Holt's response was lost in the crackling.

"Jimmybuck, I love you," Jane said. She began to cry too.

"Same here, kid. All youse kids. But—" The static chose that exact moment to let up, so the harshness came through. "This is no place to say it, huh? We'll do whatever the Old Man tells us, Bill and me. So long, darling."

"Jimmy!" she called, once and again. Only the static answered. Until Swanberg said, recognizable as himself: "I think we better cut off transmission for a while."

"Is that you, Billy?" Zellman asked.

"This is Swanberg, yes."

"Billy, we've been trying as hard as we can to get your Laurie for you, but—"

"Aeolus to Canaveral," Swanberg said. "Over and out." There was a distinct snick. The static went off the air.

That bastard!

Zellman turned to Jane in the screen. She was weeping, quite prettily. But beyond a certain point in affairs like this, you risked a public squawk. "I think we had best leave you for a while,

Janie," he said, sweet and low. "Not alone, of course. You will never be alone again; our hearts will always be with you."

She whirled on him and screamed: "I've played your game! Why not? It might get him back. And we've got four children and she only has two!"

Luckily, Zellman and the camera crews had seen that coming, and had a delay circuit to help them. None of her outburst went onto the air.

THE teleboard said BILLYS MOTHER CONTACTED IN TWIN FALLS AND CONSENTS TO INTERVIEW BUT NO SCRIPT. Zellman signalled "Stand by" and his order was phoned to Idaho. Better space the tear jerking scenes further apart. He switched to outside views of the Holt and Swanberg houses, with his own commentary. The state police were breaking up the traffic jams.

Whoa! Laurie herself came out on the porch. She swatted three reporters aside and yelled for a cop and got him to chase everybody off her grounds. There was no chance for closeups; her door slammed again before a telecamera could arrive. But even from a distance—what a scene, what a SCENE!

Of course, she wasn't doing her husband's chances any good. Buckler wasn't dumb enough to

sentence the more popular man to death. . . . Trouble was, though, Swanberg was a big, good-looking, outdoors type; and not just any slob rocketeer, but a co-inventor of the rad screen. Popularity. . . .

The teleboard awoke. Zellman surged from his chair. He almost didn't find words, this was so big. He actually did forget to signal for a sheet of paper.

"Flash! Here's the word from Base headquarters. General Buckler has issued an announcement. Quote: 'Not only are Mr. Holt and Mr. Swanberg both valuable members of our project and citizens of our community, they are both civilians. As such, they lie beyond my authority to give more than normal orders, and this is not a normal situation. I have therefore sent a special request to the President that he decide which of them should perform the task in question. A reply is expected shortly.'

"Unquote. That was General Buckler's decision: to let the President of the United States choose, in the name of all America. While we wait, anxiously and prayerfully, here is a word from—"

FALLING and falling, Swanberg thought. And now the silence had began to press inward. Still he heard click, buzz, whirr, whuff; lately he had been

hearing the blup-blup of his heartbeat. (Maybe that was because it had gotten irregular, sometimes skipping so that he jerked in his harness and tried not to gasp.) Yet the silence grew.

Imagination, he understood ir-ritably. Silence wasn't a thing, it was an absence of sound, just as the void was an absence of matter. His sensation of black nothing eating in toward the core of himself was purely subjective, based on no more than . . . well, reality. The universe was in fact a trillion light-years of emptiness wherein a few sand grains were lost.

*No, now you're thinking like Jim. Size hasn't got anything to do with importance. Vacuum and gamma radiation are real, sure. But so's the sunlight on a mountain lake, and Laura, and—*He shook his weary head and turned to Holt. The pilot had tuned radio reception so far down that they could hear only a murmur; but he was alert for anything important. "What's being sent us now?" Swanberg asked.

Holt put his ear close to the receiver. "The Reverend Norbert Victor Poole, author of the best-selling book *The Strength in Confident Living*, will deliver us a message of hope shortly. And the Emperor of Abyssinia has added his official best wishes to those of other governments."

"Yeah," Swanberg mumbled.

Presently: "If they don't get off their dead ends and reach a decision soon, we'll have to toss a coin."

"Can't toss a coin in free fall, even if we had one," Holt said. "Gotta match fingers. You know, odd or even number of fingers spread at the same time. If you match me, you win, otherwise I do. Unless you'd rather it was the other way around."

Swanberg checked the odds. "Makes no difference."

"Maybe we should'a done it that way in the first place," Holt said. "Instead of asking Base for orders. But I just automatically figured—Or didn't I have the nerve? Better this way. Let an outsider give the word, backed by public opinion if not by law, and the unlucky one has got to go, period. But if we matched, and I lost . . . dunno what I'd do."

"Scared?" Swanberg asked, forcing a smile. *

"Christ, yes. Worse every minute. Why don't those sods *decide*?"

"Would you like to make a choice like that . . . for somebody else?"

"I'd get it over with. I would! Judas, Bill, you aren't human, sitting there so quiet and—Why won't Laura talk to you?"

"With a planetful of morons listening in?" Swanberg snapped. "We know what we're

thinking right now, she and I. It's nobody else's business."

"Hey!" He saw Holt stiffen in the spacesuit. The pilot reached a fist toward him. "Do you mean Janie—What're you getting at? Spit it out!"

"Sorry. I'm awfully sorry," Swanberg exclaimed in dismay. "I didn't mean anything. Honest. Your arrangements are your own affair. She's got to do what she thinks is right."

HOLT unclenched his fist. The hand drifted limply between them. "I'm sorry too," he muttered. "I blew my top. She did embarrass the hell out of me." Suddenly he laughed. "What are we doing, being embarrassed? One of us is going to die in an hour or so."

"No, he'll take several days to die, on Earth," Swanberg said, stolidly, since that was his best defense against panic. "They'll send him wherever he asks." He paused. "They might even let him alone."

"Fat chance," Holt said.

Swanberg fumbled for words. "If . . . if you're the loser, Jim . . . I'll see to it that your family—"

"Oh, they'll be left well off, money-wise," Holt said. "Yours too, I suppose. Bill—"

"Yes?"

"Are you scared like I am?"

"Worse, probably."

"Thanks for saying so, any-

how. It's this sitting and waiting. I'd almost rather go out and do the job now, myself!" Holt started. "Hey, isn't that a call from Base?" He turned the receiver to full volume. The mellow baritone rolled forth:

"—Oh, my brave brothers, be happy, be confident. There is no death. God is waiting to call you home."

Swanberg reached out a long arm and switched on the transmitter. "Aeolus to Earth," he said, loud and clear. "Horse manure." He switched off again and Holt turned the receiver back down.

THE President of the United States left his desk and went to a window. Outside, the White House lawn stretched dazzling green—*What a beautiful planet we have*, he thought; *why do men go away from her to die?*—until it ended at the fence. Beyond, sidewalk and street were packed solid. The police had stopped trying to make the crowd move on. It wasn't physically possible. The latest word was that one man had had a fatal heart attack and one women of less than average stature had suffocated out there. Not that the crowd was disorderly. The President thought he had never seen one more quiet.

"Death watch," he said aloud.

"Sir?" asked h's press secre-

tary. They were alone together.

"Nothing. You know," said the President, "it's funny how a person keeps thinking of irrelevancies at a time like this. Anything to postpone the main issue. I keep wondering whether Buckler pulled me such a scurvy trick that I ought to have him transferred to the Aleutians . . . or did the only right and honorable thing under the circumstances."

"He could have told Holt and Swanberg to make their own decision," said the press secretary.

"No. That would have been shifting the burden onto them. And they have enough to bear." The President sighed. "There isn't any basis for decision. I've spent an hour with their dossiers. Both are fine, decent, outstanding citizens. Both have dependents who'd be cruelly hurt."

"Holt has two more kids than Swanberg does, Mr. President."

"That cuts very little ice with me. Especially remembering that Holt has no close kin alive, while Swanberg's got a mother and two sisters."

"Last time I had Tom Zellman on the phone, down at Canaveral, he said calls coming in to his station were running about five to three in favor of Holt. Of Holt getting back whole, I mean."

"No doubt," said the President dryly. "Swanberg and his wife have been less politic, shall we say. However, I feel reasonably

sure that his backers tend to be more intellectual, somewhat wealthier, and with more influence per capital. Three bankers and college presidents versus five housewives and mail clerks. Beg pardon, I mean five homemakers and junior executives. What sort of odds will that amount to by the time the next election rolls around? Pretty even, I'd guess."

The secretary made no answer, but the President filled one in for him and went on:

"Bitter? Of course I am. Bitter at how this whole affair has been mishandled, and bitter, with quite a little self-pity, at becoming the goat. The one who has to say, He shall live and you must die. I never wanted to play God."

"You'll have to, Mr. President."

"Uh-huh. Right now. I've prepared two statements here, one for Holt and one for Swanberg, explaining the reasons why he should be the survivor. They are good, sound, carefully chosen and shrewdly phrased reasons, if I do say so myself."

"And—?" The secretary stepped close.

"Lend me a quarter, Bob."

Wordlessly, the coin changed hands. "Heads, Holt," the President said. "Tails, Swanberg." He tossed. The coin caught a shaft of sunlight and glittered. He didn't catch it. It went on the rug. Both men knelt to look.

"Heads," said the secretary in a whisper.

The President nodded. He got slowly to his feet, like an aging man, and tore the paper with Swanberg's qualifications into shreds. The other he handed to the secretary. "Give this to the press as my considered reasons for picking Holt," he said. "Then clear my calendar. I'll call Buckler myself—I've got that much guts left—but I can't see anyone else today. Nobody."

CANAVERAL to Aeolus. Canaveral to Aeolus. Are you there? Come in, Aeolus."

Abruptly Holt knew what the mumble was—two or three syllables leaped out into his understanding—and he turned the volume high with darkness rising ragged before his eyes.

"Aeolus to Canaveral," said Swanberg across the roar in Holt's ears. "We read you. Come in, Canaveral."

How could Bill sit there like a stone toad and talk? Holt wondered for a moment if his own heart was going to explode.

"(Got them for you, sir.) Hello, Aeolus. This is General Buckler. How are you doing?"

"Okay," said Swanberg. Fighting his pulse rate down toward something reasonable, Holt saw that every trace of color had left the electronician's face. Yet he spoke with machine precision.

"But we'll have to begin deceleration soon or our air supply will get dangerously low."

"That's understood, Swanberg . . . Bill . . . that is you, isn't it? Yes. We, uh, we've heard from the President. Five minutes ago".

"What?" asked Swanberg without inflection. Holt clenched his fists until the nails scored the palms.

"I'm sorry, Bill," Buckler got out.

Swanberg didn't move a muscle, but the ventilation stirred the yellow hair on his head.

"The President's message is as follows," Buckler said. "'My decision has been impossibly difficult, for both William Swanberg and James Holt are men whose loss will be felt as grievously by their country as by their own loved ones. However, since a decision must be made, in view of the fact that he has more children and that possibly he will make less pilot error in returning the capsule to Earth if he knows he is to live, I recommend that Mr. Holt remain within the cabin. To Mr. Swanberg and his family I can only extend my deepest sympathy and my assurance that none of us will ever forget his service.'"

"Thanks," Swanberg said. "We'll get right to work."

"W-w-we're trying to contact your wife," said Buckler.

"No!" Swanberg exclaimed. "Not that. Leave her alone, you hear me?" He snapped off the transmitter with such violence that he almost broke the switch.

I'm going to live, it shouted in Holt. *I'm going to live*. Then he met Swanberg's eyes.

THEY regarded each other a long time. "What can I say, Bill?" Holt managed in the end. He could barely form the words; his tongue felt like a lump of wood.

"Nothing. It's okay, Jim. No hard feelings." Swanberg was quite gray, but he extended his hand.

"Damnation, I wish—I almost wish—"

"It's okay, I tell you." Swanberg left his hand out, untaken, for Holt hadn't seen it. "The President's a good man. Wasn't easy for him either."

"N-no. I wish he'd left out that 'loved ones' cornball, though."

"Me too. Well, no sense wasting time. Shake," Swanberg reminded him.

They clasped hands. Both felt cold.

"Hello, Billy, and you too, Jimmy," roared the receiver. "This is Tom Zellman down at Base. By special arrangement, at this most solemn moment, the Boys' Choir of the New York cathedral of your church, Billy, is preparing to sing the hymns chosen by your

mother in Twin Falls. We will be bringing you her own voice as soon as we can. Meanwhile, the Reverend Norbert Victor Poole—"

"Oh, no!" Holt breathed.

"Hello, Jimmy," said the rich baritone. "Yes, you, Jimmy. I am talking to you. For you have a role even more difficult than Billy. He is making the supreme sacrifice and then going to his so fully deserved eternal reward. But you must live. You must use the life your friend is giving you, confidently, inspiringly, so that the youth of America—"

Holt turned him off.

"You'll have to switch back on," Swanberg sighed. "To get return instructions. But I dare say they'll skip the organ music then." His lips tightened. "Help me on with my helmet, will you? I've got to get outside. Before Mother—Hurry up, will you?"

Holt sat very still. *I don't have to dance at their show*, he thought. *I haven't got strings tied on me. Yet*. It was as if someone else entered him.

"Wait a minute," he said, speaking fast so that he wouldn't get time to interrupt himself; for the fear was thick in his chest. "Ease off. I've got some say in this too."

"You?" Swanberg's tone hurt. Maybe he didn't mean the way he spoke, but—

"Yeah," Holt chattered. "I've

been here with you a good many hours now, listening to 'em below passing the buck, like a mucking three-stage rocket, Buckler to the President, and meanwhile using us to sell underarm grease. Using Janie, as far as that goes. I wish she'd had Laura's backbone."

"Hell," muttered Swanberg, flushing the least bit, "that's only a matter of—uh—"

"Lemme finish, damn you! We started this nightmare, you and me, passing the buck ourselves. Now it's come back to us. Or ought to, at least. We're the third stage. What the hell am I saying? Mainly, I guess, we don't have to go along with this farce. The President knows that. Think his words over. He didn't order, he recommended. He hasn't got power to give orders. As long as this bucket is aloft, only the captain can give orders that stick, and I'm the captain."

"What are you getting at?" Swanberg's big hands reached as if to seize Holt and shake him, but withdrew again, an inch at a time. The ship mumbled, tumbling through endlessness.

"We don't have to go along

with them," Holt yelled. "I've had it, I tell you. Up to here. Shut up, I'm the captain. Listen. I'm not trying to be any hero, but—I don't know. Maybe I'm afraid you'd come back every night. . . . I'll take full responsibility, when we reach Base. You don't have to fear any consequences. Buckler, the President, and now me. I'm the third stage and I've cut loose and I'm going home under my own power!"

HE recognized the hope that flickered so wildly across the other man's face, and a part of him shrieked with anger at the foolishness of the other part and none of him understood very well what this was about. But having gone this far, he couldn't retreat. And it was worth it—maybe completely worth it, maybe only almost worth it—to know, for however long he might live, that he was a free man.

"What do you mean?" Swanberg sagged in his harness.

"We're going to do this right," Holt answered. He put one hand behind his back. "Odd or even. Match me."

THE END

When answering an advertisement be sure to say you saw it in

AMAZING STORIES

THEODORE STURGEON

no more than human

By SAM MOSKOWITZ



IT walked in the woods. "It was never born. It existed. Under the pine needles the fires burn, deep and smokeless in the mold. In heat and in darkness and decay there is growth. It grew, but it was not alive. It walked unbreathing through the woods, and thought and saw and was hideous and strong, and it was not born and it did not live. It grew and moved about without living."

Those were the opening paragraphs of one of the most remarkable stories to appear in the canon of science-fantasy. *It* was the title of the story, and it appeared in the Aug., 1940, issue of UNKNOWN, a magazine dedicated to the publication of tales that would be different from any of

the conventional science-fiction or weird-fiction magazines.

The intonations of the opening passages set the mood for the introduction of a monstrous life form, a mass of putrescence and slime coating the skeleton of a dead man that spontaneously became instinct with awareness: "It had no mercy, no laughter, no beauty. It had strength and great intelligence. And—perhaps it could not be destroyed."

Authors had created monsters before, many whose names became synonyms for terror, but none of them had been treated with such objectivity or presented with such incredible mastery of style.

"Styles" would have been the better term, for the author was a

virtuoso, possessing absolute pitch for the cadence of words, altering the mood and beat of his phraseology with the emotional deliberateness of background music in a moving picture.

The question was as universal as it was inevitable: Who is Theodore Sturgeon?

It was not that Theodore Sturgeon was unknown to the science-fiction world. Four stories had appeared previously, the first of them *Ether Breather* in the Sept., 1939, issue of *ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION*, winning first place by reader vote over all stories in that number. *Ether Breather* was a clever spoof at the television industry, in a year when there was virtually no such industry, involving "etheric" intelligences that humorously altered television transmission. Lightly, almost frothily written, it invited examination of style to no greater a degree than a theatrical bedroom farce.

The same slick, lightweight prose and superficially bubbling good humor dominated *A God in the Garden*, which was presented in the November, 1939, *UNKNOWN*, wherein a pre-historic "God" grants a man the handy attribute of having every word he utters come factually true, even if it were not so before he opened his mouth; *Derm Fool* (*UNKNOWN*, March, 1940) is built about the plight of several

people who shed their skin every 24 hours as the result of a poisonous snake bite, while *He Shuttles* (*UNKNOWN*, April, 1940) is a deviant on the old saw of a man granted three wishes and ending up in a situation where the wishes are in such contradiction that he must back up in time and perpetually repeat his actions.

Sturgeon's first four stories were written, apparently, by a lighthearted young man with a facile style, and intended to do no more than entertain. *It*, however, displayed that an extraordinary talent was at work, capable of producing serious work of a lasting nature. The 22-year-old man who had written *It*, handsome, sensitive and whimsical of features, with a trim build and a captivating manner, was destined to become a giant in the fields of science fiction and fantasy.

THEODORE Sturgeon was born Edward Hamilton Waldo, Feb. 26, 1918, in St. George, Staten Island, N. Y. His father was in the retail paint business and was of Dutch-French ancestry, a line unbroken back to 1640 in the New World. His literary and artistic inclinations seem to stem from his mother, a Canadian-English poetess who taught literature and produced amateur plays.

An Episcopalian by birth,

Sturgeon's background was heavily weighted with the pressures of the ministry, with eight ministers on his father's side, one of them an Archbishop of the West Indies and another a Bishop of Quebec. Young Edward and brother Peter, who was 15 months older, attended church and Sunday school regularly until the age of 12. Since their parents liked to sleep late, the two boys made an occasional exception to this routine and would duck church every time they could get their hands on a copy of BALLYHOO, a popular humor magazine during the Thirties. On completing their reading, they would return home with a vivid and detailed account of the religious services, which effectively reassured their parents.

While their early home life was happy enough, all was not well with their parents' marriage. Sturgeon's father did not live at home after the boy was five years of age. His parents were divorced in 1927, when he was barely turned nine; and his father remarried and went to live in Baltimore.

Edward ran into trouble when his mother remarried in 1929. His stepfather had been an instructor of English in Scottish schools. An immensely accomplished scholar and linguist, his stepfather revered anyone who took learning seriously. It was

obvious that both his stepsons were highly intelligent, yet they were very poor students, attaching little importance to knowledge. Edward was more than lackadaisical; he was perverse in high school, requiring constant discipline. The stepfather found himself psychologically incapable of excusing this attitude; and while he supported the youths and stood up for them in time of trouble, there were no allowances or special kindnesses forthcoming. He did, however, make it possible for Theodore Sturgeon to carry his present name. The old Scotsman was named Sturgeon, and young Edward had always wanted to be called "Ted"; so when he was baptized his name officially became Theodore Hamilton Sturgeon, and that is his legal name today.

STURGEON went to a private seminary in Staten Island up until the fourth grade. Then he entered a boys' preparatory school in Pennsylvania. When he enrolled in high school, at the age of 12, his family was living in Philadelphia. Young Theodore was an emaciated weakling, a suitable subject for the "before" physical culture advertisements. High school proved a place of horror. His mother forced him to wear short pants and he arrived for registration with golden, fuzzy hair, riding on a scooter. Most

of the kids, then, wore knickers, and Sturgeon used to hide from them. Whenever he showed himself bullies hazed him unmercifully, despite gallant attempts to fight back. To top it off he had virtually no interest in study.

Then, one day, he watched an exhibition of gymnastics on the school's parallel bars. The sport thrilled him. He begged for a chance to participate and drilled with fanatical enthusiasm, getting up at five in the morning and leaving hours after the school day. In 12 months he had gained 6 pounds and developed powerful arms and a heavy chest. His schoolmates' contempt turned to respect. The second year he became captain of the gym team, and at the ages of 13 and 14 was permitted to instruct the class. Sturgeon's consuming ambition, now, was to become a career gymnast with Barnum & Bailey's circus. Temple University in Philadelphia, offered him a two-year athletic scholarship. Life now had a purpose.

When Sturgeon was 15 he became ill with rheumatic fever. Before he recovered there was a 16% enlargement of the heart. That was the end of gymnastics, forever. Sturgeon's entire life came crashing down. He never was going to be a flyer in Barnum & Bailey. He grew angry at the world, began to give everyone trouble. Never a good student, he

neglected his subjects still further and began dressing in weird outfits just to be annoying.

TO make things worse, Sturgeon's stepfather enforced seemingly harsh home conditions. Though they had a radio, the boys were not permitted to listen to it. Every evening Ted and his brother were required to attend a one-and-one-half-hour reading in his stepfather's library. The books, both fiction and non-fiction, covered an inspiring selection of subjects and the readings were sustained for many years. It was here that he first became acquainted with *The Time Machine* and *Twenty Thousand Leagues Beneath the Sea*. But Ted had no appreciation of the literary background he was getting. Exercising a prescribed right that the boys could ask any question they wished concerning the material read, Ted Sturgeon showed an unholy and recurring delight in innocently requesting an explanation for the word "orgy."

The stepfather demanded that the boys earn their own spending money. Yet when he caught Ted enterprisingly selling newspapers on a corner one block away from Drexel University where he taught languages, he quickly put a stop to it. Ted went out and got a job collecting garbage for an apartment house, and failed com-

pletely to understand his stepfather's explosion regarding *that*. Ted pleaded to be permitted to attend college, but his stepfather, suspecting that campus frivolity was Ted's motive, refused. Ted settled for Penn State Nautical School, whose two-year course ended in the granting of a third mate's papers. A \$100 graduation present from his grandmother took care of most of the \$125 tuition fee. In Nautical School Ted encountered discipline and hazing on an undreamed of and unprecedented scale. He stuck it out until the end of the term. Then, at 17 he went to sea as a wiper.

DURING his three years at sea Sturgeon began to write. He sold a short-short story to McClure's Syndicate, in 1937. McClure's paid \$5 for the story and it was published in dozens of newspapers throughout the United States. During the next two years he sold 40 short stories to this market, none of which were fantasy and all of which were published under the name of Theodore Sturgeon. (One newspaper that carried them all was **THE MILWAUKEE JOURNAL**.) These were not intended as hack work; Sturgeon did his best in each of them. During this period he lived with an Italian shipmate in the Hell's Kitchen section of New York. The years were punc-

tuated by stints at sea, and it was while trying to find a ship out of a Texas port that Sturgeon made a deal with a small-town politician who owned a general store. Sturgeon wrote the man's campaign speeches. In payment, Sturgeon received day-old cup cakes, which literally were all that stood between him and starvation at the time. (The politician won the election.)

One science-fiction story, written about then, was titled *Helix the Cat* and concerned a scientist and his cat. The story never sold and the manuscript has been misplaced. But Sturgeon's decision to try to sell to the fantasy magazines came as the result of a friendship with a Brooklyn couple. The wife was a leading writer for true confession magazines. One day, her husband slapped the first (March, 1939) **UNKNOWN** down in front of Sturgeon and said: "This is the kind of thing you ought to try to write." Sturgeon was enchanted. This was not his first acquaintance with science-fiction and fantasy. Though one of the strict taboos insisted upon by his stepfather was "No Science-Fiction!", Sturgeon had since 1930 intermittently read **AMAZING STORIES**, **WONDER STORIES**, **ASTOUNDING STORIES** and **WEIRD TALES**. As a youngster his favorite characters were Anthony Gilmore's Hawk Carse and John W. Campbell's Arcot-Wade-

Morey trio. In the line of pure fantasy he had been deeply impressed by *The Charwoman's Shadow* by Lord Dunsany, *Green Mansions* by W. H. Hudson, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll. Before he began serious writing of fiction Sturgeon composed a good amount of poetry and occasionally, a bit of verse, of very high quality, appears in his short stories. His poetic idols were William Blake, famed for *The Tiger*, and William Morris. One poem by Theodore Sturgeon, *Look About You!* which appeared illustrated in the January, 1940 UNKNOWN, is exceptional enough to warrant consideration in any substantial anthology of modern poems by American authors. He abandoned most serious attempts at verse after he began to sell fiction commercially.

WITH this as his background and a copy of UNKNOWN in his foreground, Sturgeon wrote a story minutely delineating the feelings of a man about to be hit by a subway train. Editor John W. Campbell ripped the story apart on the basis that when the protagonist is the same at the ending as he was at the beginning of the narrative, the result is not a story but an anecdote. Fortified with this erudition, Sturgeon went home and wrote *The God in the Garden*, which

was the first story he sold to Campbell. This success caused him to quit the sea and settle down to work as a professional writer.

While trying to write more stories for Campbell he found himself persistently distracted by a bizarre notion that kept creeping into his thoughts. Unable to continue with his regular work until he disposed of it, he interrupted the story he was working on and in four hours wrote *Bianca's Hands*, a horrifying tale of a man so enamored by the expressive hands of an idiot woman that he marries her, only to die in ecstasy at the thrill of having those superb hands choke the life from him. Sturgeon thrust the tale back in the drawer with no immediate intention of selling it and continued with the story he had been working on.

With sales being made regularly to UNKNOWN and ASTOUNDING, Sturgeon decided to marry his high-school sweetheart, Dorothy Fillingame. Her parents violently objected to Sturgeon's occupation and background, but a week after the girl turned 21 parental objections were defied, and the couple married. In 10 consecutive hours of inspiration, on their honeymoon, Sturgeon wrote the nightmarish masterpiece that created his first reputation—*It*.

He was now a fully accepted

member of Campbell's "stable" of writers, which included names as prominent as Heinlein, van Vogt, L. Ron Hubbard, L. Sprague de Camp, E. E. Smith, Lester del Rey. In this capacity, Ted was sometimes given a chance at a special assignment. Sturgeon rewrote several stories which had strong plots but which were inadequately written. These appeared as *Hag Seleen*, a superbly written Cajun story of a girl-child who turns a witch's magic against her (UNKNOWN WORLDS, Dec., 1942) and *The Bones*, a clever fantasy about a machine that permits the viewer actually to experience the final events that happened to fragments of matter placed in it (UNKNOWN WORLDS, Aug., 1943). Both of these stories were written before June, 1940.

With his wife now pregnant, Sturgeon wrote steadily to support his family. *Butyl and the Breather* (ASTOUNDING, Oct., 1940) was a light-hearted farce and a sequel to *The Ether Breathers*; *Cargo* (UNKNOWN, Nov., 1940) told of all the brownies, fairies and various other "little people" shipping out of Europe during World War II; *Shottle Bop* (UNKNOWN, Feb., 1941) proved a very popular fantasy concerning a gnomelike owner of a shop who sold "bottles with things in them"; and by this time Sturgeon was so prolific

that *Ultimate Egoist* in the same issue appeared under the pen name of E. Hunter Waldo.

WHILE it made no special impact at the time of publication, *Poker Face* (ASTOUNDING, March, 1941) is historically important as one of the earliest science-fiction stories based on the notion that other-worldly aliens are living and working among us and at any moment may open the lid on that third eye or pull their extra hands from beneath their waistcoat. Readers may not have grasped the significance of *Poker Face*, but *Microcosmic God* (in the April, 1941, ASTOUNDING) had all the reaction of an atomic bomb. It was not that the idea was new; the concept of a microscopic world of intelligent creatures, producing inventions at an accelerated rate relative to their own time span, had been touched upon in *Out of the Sub-Universe* by R. F. Starzl, AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY, Summer, 1928); had been defined in complete detail by Edmond Hamilton in *Fessenden's World* (WEIRD TALES, April, 1937) and registered as a poignant classic in Calvin Perego's *Short-Wave Castle* (ASTOUNDING STORIES, Feb., 1934)—but Sturgeon did it best.

The modest fame as master of fantasy which Sturgeon had attained with *It* was far transcended by the acclaim brought to him

by *Microcosmic God*. Far from being pleased, Sturgeon was first annoyed and then infuriated. The kindest thing he could say for *Microcosmic God* was that it was "fast-paced." He deplored the fact that it did not have the "literary cadence" of many of his other less-complimented works; and he deeply resented the fact that readers didn't even seem to get the point: that a superman need not be a powerful, commanding person. He failed to understand that he had struck the universal chord. Stories like *Shottle Bop*, where you got what you wanted by "wishing," were good fun, but nobody in this modern technological age believed them. To the contrary, a story like *Microcosmic God*, where a man could get anything he wanted by logical scientific means made possible the complete suspension of disbelief and utter absorption of the reader by the story. Therein rested its appeal.

THE Sturgeon name increasingly became a focus for the readership. One remarkably well done story, *Nightmare Island*, under the pseudonym of E. Waldo Hunter in the June, 1941, *ASTOUNDING* failed to achieve any special note. Derived from a reference in a 1910 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* to a "Tube Worm", it dealt with a

Kingdom of Worms in which a castaway alcoholic was worshipped as a god.

Financial opportunity seemed to beckon to Sturgeon in the form of an offer to run a luxury hotel in the British West Indies. This sounded like a heavenly way to make a living, and seemed to offer a great deal more security than writing. So Sturgeon packed up his belongings, his wife and his six-month old baby girl, Patricia, and left the United States. He had barely ensconced himself in the hotel when Pearl Harbor was bombed and the United States entered the war. This meant the end of the tourist trade and the hotel. Sturgeon's wife took a secretarial job at Fort Symington and Sturgeon took to selling hosiery, door to door. He finally got to run three mess halls and 17 barracks buildings for the army, then worked into running a gas station and a tractor lubrication operation. The powerful tractors, bulldozers and cranes fascinated him, so he learned to operate them. He accepted a job in Puerto Rico as a Class A bulldozer and just loved it, moving his wife and child to that country.

In 1944, with the European phase of the war drawing to a close, the base and the job folded. Now there was a second child, Cynthia. Sturgeon rented a house in St. Croix, the Virgin

Islands, and desperately tried to make ends meet. There had been no writing in two-and-a-half years. Campbell wasn't too helpful or encouraging but, spurred by necessity, Sturgeon applied himself and wrote *Killdozer*, a 37,000 word novelette, in nine days. That story, about a primeval electronic intelligence that takes over a bulldozer clearing an airfield on a Pacific Island, embodied the vivid impressions of a sensitive artist of the power, sound, smell, and mortal danger of the mechanical behemoths. It became the cover story of the November, 1944, issue of *ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION*. He received \$545, the largest single amount he had earned by writing.

But the check didn't last long, and Sturgeon went into a writing funk that he was unable to snap. He took advantage of a clause in his government contract which would pay for his plane fare back to the United States. He was to fly to a friend in Chicago, then go to New York, get a literary agent and make arrangements to get his family back to the States. The entire trip was to take 10 days. But things didn't work out. He couldn't find an agent. He was unable to write. The 10 days stretched into eight months. During certain periods his main source of sustenance was the three meals a week he ate at the home of his half-sister.

Finally a letter arrived from his wife. She wanted a divorce. For two months he couldn't make up his mind what to do, but a job he had obtained as a copy editor for an advertising agency at \$75 a week made it possible for him to raise enough money to return to St. Croix. He and his wife talked things over, but her confidence in him was shattered. They were divorced in St. Thomas, V.I.

STURGEON returned to New York in 1946, moving into the bachelor apartments of L. Jerome Stanton, then assistant editor of *ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION*. Stanton had a near-empty apartment and Sturgeon had some furniture in storage, so they made a deal. As far as finances were concerned Sturgeon was able to contribute little. He operated in a constant daze for months. Campbell befriended him, having him as a house guest for weeks at a stretch.

Gradually, Campbell coaxed Sturgeon out of his depression. One day, in the basement of the editor's home, Ted sat down at a typewriter and wrote *The Chromium Helmet*. Campbell read the first draft out of the typewriter and accepted the story, which appeared in *ASTOUNDING*, June, 1946. Reading more like a television script than science-fiction, this novelette of a hair dryer that fished one's most wished-for de-

sires from the subconscious and left the subject convinced these yearnings had been fulfilled only superficially disguised its artifices, yet it seemed to sit well with the reader.

Mewhu's Jet, a long novelette which appeared later that year in the November ASTOUNDING was a much better story. Engrossingly, and with a style as clear as crystal, Sturgeon told of the landing of a space ship and an alien; the attempts to communicate with it; and the final wry realization that the outsider was a lost child with a super-toy who didn't even know where he came from, let alone the workings of his mechanism.

SOMETHING else happened during 1946. Sturgeon had peddled dozens of products door to door in the past in an effort to make a living. Now he decided to try his hand as a literary agent. In addition to handling his own efforts he worked up quite a prominent group of clients including A. Bertram Chandler, William Tenn, Judith Merrill, Frederik Pohl, Robert W. Lowndes, and Larry Shaw. This profession lasted precisely from January to December of 1946. For years after that Sturgeon would not have an agent himself because: "I wouldn't put my affairs in the hands of anyone in so much trouble."

AGENTING, however was the open sesame to a new world. Up to now Sturgeon had but a single market: John W. Campbell's magazines. Now he found his old rejections from UNKNOWN and ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION welcome at WEIRD TALES by editor Lamont Buchanan. Within the next few years he would resurrect *Cellmate*, *Deadly Ratio*, *The Professor's Teddy Bear*, *Abreaction*, *The Perfect Host* and *The Martian and the Moron* from the trunk, and enjoy an enthusiastic reception and new reputation at WEIRD TALES. THRILLING WONDER STORIES, which for years had followed a juvenile policy, went adult in 1947 and took *The Sky Was Full of Ships*, a tale of a warning of interplanetary invasion.

Through the years Sturgeon had tried to sell the nightmarish *Bianca's Hands*. Agents, editors, and friends were horrified by the concept. An editor told him he would never buy from an author whose mind could conceive notions like that. An agent told him he didn't want to be associated with an author whose bent carried him in such directions. Every magazine it was submitted to rejected it. Impelled by his recent good fortune in selling to new markets, Sturgeon mailed the story to the British ARGOSY.

Sturgeon won a \$1,000 prize with the story, edging out the

celebrated Graham Greene. (It appeared in *ARGOSY* for May, 1947.) More than just money was involved here, though. The various ups and downs of his literary career had severely shaken Sturgeon's estimate of himself. One of the most accomplished stylists in the field, he still doubted whether he could actually write well enough to be a sustained success at writing. The bulls-eye scored by this story, written at a very early stage in his career, convinced him that he had always possessed the literary qualifications of a good writer. His work immediately began to reflect this new confidence.

Campbell had pointedly anticipated the advent of atomic power. Now he chronically egged on his writers to explore the ramifications of this discovery. Sturgeon was scarcely immune from this insistence, and his first story of atomic doom, *Memorial*, was anything but memorable. Therefore, his second such story, *Thunder and Roses*, in the Nov., 1947, *ASTOUNDING*, routinely blurbed as an "atomic energy" story, suggested nothing special. It wasn't until anthologist August Derleth picked it up for *Strange Ports of Call* in 1948 that it had an almost delayed-action effect on the science-fiction world. Sturgeon had taken the most maudlin of themes: the United States, virtually de-

stroyed by an enemy nuclear attack, debated the ethics of striking back when the retaliatory weapons would raise the radiation level to the point where every higher organism would be eradicated, eliminating any hope for another creature to rise to a state of civilization. Yet, he pulled it off magnificently, even including a poem in the story which was later set to music.

STURGEON had now earned his first hard-cover selection, *Without Sorcery*, published by Prime Press, Philadelphia in 1948. It was distinguished by an introduction written especially for the volume by Ray Bradbury. That author was already gathering steam, building towards his present considerable reputation. He wrote: "Perhaps the best way I can tell you what I think of a Theodore Sturgeon story is to explain with what diligent interest, in the year 1940, I split every Sturgeon tale down the middle and fetched out its innards to see what made it function. At that time I had not sold one story, I was 20, I was feverish for the vast secrets of successful writers. I looked upon Sturgeon with a secret and gnawing jealousy." *Without Sorcery* was dedicated to Sturgeon's new love, Mary Mair: "Who in spite of the envy of the angels will live forever." However, the marriage that re-

sulted from their friendship in 1949 did not last forever. It was dissolved in 1951.

Accused of a "lack of maturity," Sturgeon had previously defended his outlook in a story titled, aptly enough, *Maturity*, originally published in the Feb., 1947 *ASTOUNDING*, but redone as virtually a new story for *Without Sorcery*. Robin English, hero of the story, (Robin is now the name of one of Sturgeon's sons) is an engaging but child-like man, whose doctor sweetheart, arranges to have him mentally raised to maturity by a series of chemical injections. Robin English becomes something unique, a literary superman with a series of phenomenally successful plays, novels and poems. The literary efforts eventually stop as the process of artificial maturity continues, and Sturgeon offers the candid suggestion that the child-like outlook is necessary to the production of works of art. A completely mature man does not engage in that type of preoccupation.

What is maturity? The closing lines of the story, where his "super-mature man" has willed himself to die, reveals Sturgeon's answer: "Enough is maturity."

PERSONAL problems no longer inactivated Sturgeon. Throughout his short and ill-desired marriage with Mary Mair,

his production was regular, displaying constantly higher standards of originality and technique. Through his friend Stanton he met his third wife, Marion McGahan. They were married in 1951. Ten years and four children later, through a kaleidoscopic series of economic ups and downs, they are still married. Sturgeon seemed to have found in Marion, a woman temperamentally suited to the inconsistencies of a full-time writer's life.

Perhaps she did not deserve all the credit, however, for there also appeared to be a change in Sturgeon's social outlook that contributed to stability. It began when the October, 1952, issue of *GALAXY* carried a novelette by Sturgeon titled *Baby is Three*. It concerned a 15-year-old youth who visits a psychiatrist to find out why he murdered a woman who befriended him and four other strange children, all gifted with one or more of the powers of telepathy, telekinesis and teleportation. Sturgeon, basing his story on the Gestalt philosophy that "a whole is more than the sum of its parts" admirably made his point when he wrote a 30,000 word preface, *The Fabulous Idiot*; and a 30,000 word epilogue, *Morality*. The three appeared as *More Than Human* in simultaneous hard-cover and paperback editions in 1953.

One of the most original and

artful productions ever to appear on the theme of extra-sensory powers, *More Than Human* won the International Fantasy Award for 1954. All the children who make up the symbiotic power relationship in *More Than Human* have been sorely abused in their formative years—particularly the hero who serves as the “ganglion” of the talented group. Though their lives are frequently far from comfortable, they gain courage from their mutuality. The denouement occurs when, with the passing of years, the nerve center of the group learns the meaning of morality and the desirability of channeling his powers into constructive channels.

WITH a writer as superbly gifted as Sturgeon, who strives in every story to be as differently and bizarrely off-trail as he is able; whose adroitness at altering the rhythm of his writing to conform to the subject gives him as many styles as stories (an artistic feat that has cost him the following that familiarity accrues), it is necessary to balance near to presumption in relating the subject matter of *More Than Human* to the personality of its author. Yet, the Gerard of *More Than Human* bears strong resemblance to his creator.

Theodore Sturgeon was a boy with a most difficult childhood, a first marriage of only temporary stability, followed by a period of great mental confusion, then a fling at frivolity, a brief second marriage, and finally the third marriage and the awakening of an acute awareness of moral responsibility. The feeling in the story that individuals in the gestalt relationship may be replaced without destroying the entity fits the pattern of Sturgeon's early changes; just as does the final decision of Gerard to keep the unity intact, supplementing his abilities with responsibility.

The steady literary production of Sturgeon ever since the appearance of *More Than Human*, with a continuous striving for higher achievement, lend strong credibility to the theory that, with his third wife and four children, Sturgeon finally established a “gestalt” arrangement in emotional harmony with the world, without sacrificing the naive freshness that made his literary creativity possible. That aspect of his sensitivity is best expressed in his poem, *Look About You*:

“We each live in a wonderland;
A blue to you is a red to me,
A shade is seen, and we call it
green—
I wonder what you see?”

THE END

PAWN of the BLACK FLEET

By MARK CLIFTON

(Conclusion)

SYNOPSIS

SPACE NAVY got its files mixed up and appointed Ralph Kennedy, Personnel Director of Computer Research, as an Extraterrestrial Psychologist assigned to the Pentagon. It accompanied the appointment with the usual threat of Courtmartial for high treason if he failed to report for duty within forty-eight hours.

He had had many previous

brushes with the Pentagon in the course of his work for Computer Research and at best his attitude toward the military mind was irreverent. Naturally a phone call failed to clear up the mistake, and a trip to the Pentagon simply made Space Navy more determined not to admit it could make a mistake. He then tried to explain to his new Chief, Dr. Kibbie, but the more he tried to tell Kibbie he was the wrong man, the more convinced Kibbie

Illustrated by FINLAY



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became that this was professional modesty and proved him the right man.

Kennedy finally gave up trying and accepted the appointment, particularly when Kibbie gave him top secret information that a mysterious Black Fleet from outer space had struck at four remote Earth locations and melted down mountains with their evil red ray.

As Kennedy reviewed the assembled evidence, which had all the solid substance of the vaguer flying saucer reports, he became convinced that Kibbie was a super confidence man, who had conned Congress out of two billion dollars expense money to study extraterrestrial life forms which hadn't yet been discovered.

When Ralph met the staff assigned to him, it was comprised of three typical Civil Service people; Shirley Chase, Administrator of his section; Dr. Gerald Gaffey, Extraterrestrial Vocational Expert; and N-462, apparently a lower echelon clerk but in reality an undercover agent who set out to prove Kennedy an impostor.

Kennedy followed the government principle that the more tax money one spent and the more people he commanded the greater his status. He began to hire large quantities of people into his department. He sent for Sara, his

former secretary at Computer Research, to assist him in building up the status level of his section.

They were hardly more than started when The Black Fleet, in which he had not really believed, appeared over Washington. The evening sky became filled with countless black discs, exuding evil blood light. All through the night he watched the wheeling maneuvers, thrilled to the incredible courage of our own puny interceptors arising to fight them, dismayed when they had no effect upon the Black Fleet. Toward morning the Fleet went away. It had done no damage and none knew why it had come nor where it went.

FOR three days, at various points of Earth, the Fleet made its appearance, went through its threatening maneuvers, and disappeared again. On the third day, it appeared again over New York City. Another man, this one without clean-cut and noble sentiments, one Harvey Strickland also watched the Fleet from his penthouse garden atop one of the many downtown buildings he owned. He was a communications magnate who had become obsessed with egomania and who believed the rest of the people were his barnyard animals whom he controlled with slogan propaganda through his chains

of newspapers, magazines and television stations.

He feared this invasion from outer space, not for the sake of the people who would simply breed faster if they were decimated, but because this invasion might be a rival to take over the power he possessed. He reasoned that he must teach them to fear him, as he had taught people to fear him through destroying them if they opposed him; and since he controlled elections he was able to pressure the White House and Congress into forcing the Pentagon to loose the hydrogen bomb upon the Fleet.

But when sacrifice pilots took the bombs aloft to loose them upon the Black Fleet nothing happened. The interceptors returned to the ground unharmed and without doing harm. While Strickland was trying to puzzle out the terrifying implications of this, he was interrupted by a clear and noble bugle call. When he stumbled out to his garden to look aloft, he saw another fleet approaching from outer space; this time pearly globes of iridescent blue—like star sapphires with shining white crosses of radiant light.

In the meantime, back at the White House, Kennedy had failed to make his advice to withhold action against the Fleet (since it had not yet done anyone harm) prevail over Strickland's demand

that the military strike with the bomb. He was on his way back to the Pentagon, under onus of counselling cowardice, when the Blue Globes appeared over Washington. He and Sara were deserted by their Cadet driver and stranded on one of Washington's streets.

Together, all through the afternoon and the long night, they watched a mighty combat take place between the two forces. There was incredible bravery in the outnumbered and weaker globes as they fought against the mightier, evil, black discs. Again and again the globes seemed defeated. Again and again they rallied and came back to do battle.

And as the night wore on, Kennedy began to feel a horrifying doubt. All this was too much in line with a Hollywood story formula. To the letter, it duplicated those countless productions of the same story—the goodie hero and the badie villain in mortal combat.

Surely it could not be. And yet, was this whole, awesome, magnificent ordeal a staged show, pure hokum—a phoney?

CHAPTER 11

THE PEOPLE on the streets were beginning to move about more actively now. There were lines forming at the doorways of community kitchens for morning

coffee. Here and there, other cars than our own were beginning to move. The morning duty was replacing the night's dream.

I snapped on the taxi television set, and as it warmed to life, one of the World Broadcasting Company's commentators was giving a rundown of happenings around the world.

Everywhere the pattern had been played out in the same way. Everywhere, at the same instant the discs had fled and the globes pursued.

Yet there was a curious lack of something (enthusiasm, gladness, gratitude?) in the commentator's voice. At first I thought he was characteristically under playing it, just giving the facts, ma'am, and then I realized there was a deliberate reluctance to express a reaction—as if he hadn't been informed as yet on company policy; and knew from experience that he'd better not have any opinion until he had been told what it ought to be.

I was about to reach over and snap him off when a stir among the increasing crowds on the street distracted me. Over the cadenced tones of the commentator, I heard a hoarse scream from a man on the sidewalk. A hoarse ecstasy. And other voices took up the cry.

"They're coming back! The Globes!"

Without being told, the driver

pulled over to the curb. On the screen I saw the face of the commentator beginning to fade and a globe beginning to appear. There was a flickering, a streaking of colors, as if the broadcast engineer were trying to maintain control of his sound and picture in spite of overpowering interference. Interference won. The sapphire blue globe with its star of radiant light steadied and glowed on the screen. I did not snap it off.

"I gotta see this," the taxi driver said. The dream had overwhelmed the duty once more. He threw open the door and slid out of his seat to stand on the curb.

We were about to follow him, Sara and I, when a new voice came through the television speaker—a voice resonant, calm, reassuring. . . .

"We come from the stars. . . ."

The voice was in English—American English.

"We mean you no harm. . . ."

This was the second sentence. It was followed by another pause. Then came two short sentences, followed by some semblance of explanation. The streets outside were as still as vacuum, except for this voice which penetrated everywhere, transcending the laws of electronic sound.

WE come as friends. We will not hurt you.

"We return as ambassadors

from our fleet which has gone in pursuit of our enemy—your enemy.

"We ask permission to land at your Capital City, Washington, District of Columbia, United States of America.

"We can only spare this one ship, with its crew of five, from the battle.

"We know you would prefer us to land at the United Nations, but there are compelling reasons why it must be Washington.

"We would give offense to none, by this, and hope you will grant our need.

"We will now withdraw to give you time for considering this petition.

"We will return in twenty-four hours, and wait the broadcasting of your permission, on any of your electronic channels.

"If you refuse, we will go away, without harming you.

"We hope you will not refuse. That you will permit us to land.

"We would like to meet you and greet you."

There was another pause, while the motionless natives thought this over. Then again came the careful, reassuring sentences:

"We mean you no harm. We come as friends.

The globe receded then.

There was dead silence in the streets for a moment after the voice ceased and the globe disappeared into the heavens.

Then a roar broke loose. There was no question of its welcome. The people were screaming in a frenzy of jubilation, embracing one another, pummeling one another.

I looked at Sara. There were tears in her eyes.

"They didn't demand anything," she said. "They could have. They could have landed without asking permission. What's to stop them? But they asked."

"Um-hum," I agreed. "And there's going to be holy hell to pay because they're landing here instead of at the United Nations. First mistake I've seen them make."

"They said they had their reasons," she reproved me.

"Um-hum," I said. "I suppose they have. They've played it too cagy all along to pull a blooper like that unless they had a reason."

Sara looked at me as if I were something white and crawling which had come out from under a rock.

How was I to know that while they were staging their big production over the major cities all over earth, this had taken only part of their attention, and that the remainder of it had been engaged in sifting and sampling through the minds and emotions of human spectators below. That unshielding these minds and

emotions had been one of the reasons for the production. That they were looking for a particular reaction to the production.

How was I to know that my doubt and cynicism of its reality was one of the first to register? That my being out of phase with my own kind brought me closer into phase with them?

How was I to know that their reason for landing in Washington was because that's where I happened to be?

CHAPTER 12

THE Starmen's diplomatic request for permission to land on the sovereign territory of the United States of America had come at 7:42 A.M.

At 8:00 A.M., the Home Office Policy Board of World Broadcasting Company (and affiliates) were assembled in their usual semi-circle of seats facing Harvey Strickland's empty desk in his penthouse office atop his New York W.B.C. skyscraper.

This time the boss did not keep them cooling their heels. He swept regally through the doorway in his purple dressing gown and took his throne seat before them.

They fervently put their all into a bright and cheerful organization-man's "Good morning, H.S." This few were permitted to H.S. him, a mark of his confi-

dence in them. Most often he observed the important executive tradition and ignored their greetings, but this morning he gave them a cheerful nod as reward.

It revealed his mood and set the tone. It insured, in advance, that their independently thought out editorials, the factual news articles, the independent commentaries and feature articles, the colloquially worded amateur-writer sentiments of Constant Reader letters to the editor, all these would reflect, confirm by selected fact, buttress by independent column and commentator philosophies, and substantiate that the right thinking public were all in unanimous agreement with Harvey Strickland's policy.

Harvey Strickland was jubilant. For all the power they had displayed, the Starmen had, nonetheless, revealed themselves as weak and uncertain. He, himself, would have landed, then and there, while the Earthmen were dazed and spent, when they had had no time to organize resistance or policy, at any time and place he chose to land without asking, without explaining. The Starmen had not done so, and were therefore—weak.

His confidence in his power and destiny all but overwhelmed him.

"They want something from us," he said in his opening sentence. "They want it bad enough

to beg us for it. We've got something they want, and we've got it right here in America. No place else, now. Remember that. Right here. Along with deciding whether we will let them have it—and at what price, remember that, gentlemen, at what price?—we've gotta fend off those thieving foreigners who will try to get in on it."

HE broke off to gaze in exasperation at the ceiling.

"Sometimes it's too much," he groaned. "It's hard enough to get those knuckleheads in Washington to do the right thing, but at the same time we've gotta keep the foreign nations in their places, too."

He squared his shoulders and became man enough to carry that extra burden.

"First question:" he resumed. "Shall we give them permission to land?"

Nobody answered. Naturally. They weren't expected to.

"Shall we give them permission to land?" he repeated. "The answer is—yes. They've said they would go away if we didn't. So far, we have to take them at their word. Within reason," he chuckled slyly. "Within reason." He stuck his tongue powerfully into one cheek. "We don't know just what they want, want bad enough to beg for it. We'll give 'em a chance to beg, before we

make up our minds on letting 'em have it."

The policy board nodded in agreement with the wise decision.

"Cautious optimism, gentlemen. That will be our policy. We greet them as distinguished foreigners have to be greeted. Distinguished foreigners with their hand out. We don't notice that they've got their hand out; not right away. We think they're coming to see us because they like us. I guess all you fellows know that routine well enough.

"Now official Washington will want to make a big hoopla out of the visit. Maybe even more than usual. We'll go along with that. Just remember not to get carried away. The knuckleheads down there have the habit of getting carried away, like kids when their team wins the game. We've gotta keep a little rein on them, keep them from giving away the country. Welcome Stranger, but cagy, see? Any questions?"

He didn't expect any. But this time there was one. It came from the head of his legal department.

"I'm sure you've already thought out the legal implications involved in their preemption and use of our broadcasting facilities without license or permission, H.S.," the man said. "Our department will want to be briefed."

Strickland hadn't thought of

that before, after all, it had been considerably less than an hour since the deed, and even a genius can't think of everything at once.

"Sure, sure, Bob," he answered genially. "But the same policy goes for your department. Let's don't file suit right off. Just hold back a little on that. We just might need that little item, at some point when we get down to negotiating. Start working on it, but hold back. Any more questions?"

AND still there was another. "What if they're not human?" asked one of the world renowned commentators who had made his reputation in crusading courageously for home, flag and mother. "What if they're—well, say, green spiders?"

A derisive titter greeted this absurdity, but the commentator, noted for his original thinking, stood his ground. He was relieved that the boss accepted the question seriously.

"It sounded like a human voice," Strickland said thoughtfully. "But they could have a machine of some kind. We've got machines, you know, that will turn a printed page into a spoken voice; so I guess they might be that far along, too. That don't mean they're human. Of course," and now he displayed one of those rare glimpses of how deep

his learning really went, "Our best philosophers have all agreed that life on other worlds would have to develop the same kind of human body and human mind as we have, if it was ever to amount to anything. The philosophers we'll pay any attention to, anyhow, all say that.

"Still, we got to be grown up about this. We gotta be—big. They just might turn out to be—well, as you say, green spiders.

"So just barely touch on that. Hint that the public ought to be prepared, just in case. Not enough that anybody can claim we came right out and said they were green spiders, in case they aren't, but hint. They're distinguished visitors and all that. We got to be grown up enough, cosmopolitan enough, not to notice whatever's wrong with them.

"Now, any more questions?" This time he stood up and turned to leave the room.

There were no more questions.

WITHIN an hour, his private plane landed him at the Washington Airport. There was no company car there to pick him up. He made a mental note of that. It showed that already his Washington organization was going to pieces. Of course he hadn't let his New York staff know he was leaving, or his Washington staff know he was coming—he didn't have to account for his

movements to the goddam underlings—but they should have guessed he might come to Washington to see everything for himself, and had a car there just in case.

Time for that, later.

He picked up a cab at the airport.

"You got a reservation at the Hotel Brighton?" asked the driver.

Strickland didn't answer him, but this was a gabby one, and didn't seem fazed by the silence.

"You better have!" the driver rambled on, as he threaded his way through the outgoing traffic. "They've already started turning people away. All the hotels have started doing that. I swear I don't see how so many people got here so fast."

Strickland began to wonder, himself, where all the people could have come from. He couldn't remember ever having seen the streets so crowded; and after a night with no sleep for anybody, too. At the Connecticut Avenue traffic circle, traffic stalled again, and the driver turned around to face him.

"Say," he asked. "D'you think those Starmen will look like people?"

Strickland began to enjoy the driver. After all, a taxi driver represents the people of America, their hopes, their fears, their opinions, their intelligence.

"I don't have any idea," he answered with a chuckle.

A FRIEND of mine," the driver was saying, "Smart cookie runs a newsstand and is pretty sharp from being around all those books and magazines. He says maybe they'll be like big green spiders, with red eyes all up and down their legs. He showed me a picture on one of the magazine covers like that. Jeez!"

Strickland nodded and smiled.

"Jeez!" the driver repeated with more emphasis, now that his fare gave agreement. "I gotta wangle a place at the Mall tomorrow morning. That's where they're going to have the reception. How are them visitors gonna know where they ought to land?"

"We'll tell 'em on the radio. Remember, we have to give them permission to land?"

"Yeah, yeah sure," the driver remembered and nodded sagely. "I guess we'll send out a landing beam for them to follow in. You think they might be smart enough to follow a landing beam down?"

"That's one I'm not going to worry about," Strickland said.

"Yeah, sure," the driver agreed instantly. "That's somebody else's problem." He thought for a moment. "Them fellows out at the Pentagon will probably check up on that one."

"Them fellows out at the Pentagon had better check up on quite a few things," Strickland answered ominously. He felt a stirring of something unfinished. Oh yes, there was some young punk out at the Pentagon he'd asked his secret service to check up on. They hadn't given him a report, yet. So now his secret service was falling down on the job. That had been yesterday, and no report yet. The battle of the globes and the discs was no excuse.

The traffic tangle unraveled, the cab jerked forward, and in a short while pulled up in front of the hotel.

"You gonna be there? At the Mall, I mean?" the driver shouted back over his shoulder.

"I'll be there," Strickland answered.

"Get yourself a good connection," the driver advised him with a sage nod. "Don't depend on your congressman or any of the common help like that. If you got a real good connection, you might make it."

"I'll make it," Strickland said confidently.

CHAPTER 13

CIVIL Service being what it is, I thought it slightly miraculous that Shirley had already browbeat enough clerks into reporting for work to pass out

forms of application for interview to the growing line of generals and admirals who wanted to be filled in on the latest estimates of extraterrestrial psychology.

Sara and I managed to get into the office not more than fifteen minutes after the final words of the Starmen, and already our day was beginning—the damndest day I ever went through. My something like five weeks in Washington had taught me a lot, but apparently not enough.

As the day progressed, in a fleeting few seconds here and there between conferences and conferences, telephone calls and telephone calls, I began to wonder how in hell the nation managed to keep going when apparently nobody was concerned with whether or not it got governed. Sitting there as I was, the answer-boy in the Bureau of Extraterrestrial Psychology, and therefore the final word on how we should conduct ourselves in relation to the Starmen, I got a pretty good cross section of what must have been going on all over Washington. A pretty good thermometer measuring the rising fever. I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised, I'd been around enough people not to be astonished at anything they might do, but I must have had an unsuspected residue of illusion left about the wisdom, level headed-

ness, good sense and balanced judgement of those who govern us.

There had to be plans, of course, for a reception of the Starmen. I had no preferences in the matter, and the Mall sounded as likely a spot for the landing as anywhere else. There was plenty of space which could be kept clear for the globe to set down, and plenty of space around the perimeter for the few dignitaries who would be permitted through the police lines.

Since the original planning took place there in the Pentagon, it was decided that a simple military welcome would be most impressive to the space visitors. Fighting men to fighting men. Just the Chief of Staff and the Joint Chiefs. With possibly a side dish of drill formation by the Space Cadets.

"And, gentlemen," I said firmly, "Representatives from the Bureau of Extraterrestrial Psychology. Dr. Kibbie, myself, my secretary, one or two others. After all, gentlemen," I answered their dubious frowns, "We are the first, the final, the only authority on the psychology of extraterrestrials. How will we be of further service to you if we don't get close enough to them to learn something of their psychology?"

They conceded that all right, it was logical enough that we should be there, but nobody else.

Was that understood? It was all right with me.

APPARENTLY it was not all right with Congress. On a clear day the screams of outrage arising on the Hill might have been heard all the way to the Pentagon. Since there were telephones, it didn't need a clear day. Under the threat of new loyalty investigations, the military backed down, and conceded that picked committees, including the members of investigating committees, of course, could be represented.

The Secretary of State decreed that really the visit was more diplomatic than military. Hadn't the Starmen, themselves, already told us they had the status of ambassadors? What was military about that? Fighting men to fighting men, indeed! Since when did ambassadors fight? If anything, it might be the worst sort of diplomatic blunder to have military men on the scene at all; construed as a threat and all that. No, these were ambassadors from star government to Earth government, and protocol demanded it be handled as such.

This pulled the plug.

From 3100 Massachusetts Avenue came the cryptic question: Since when did the State Department of the United States represent Earth government? The Right Honorable British Amba-

sador, Knight Commander of the Bath, C.B.E., expected to be placed in line of reception at the Mall, and in a position commensurate with Empire Status.

Almost simultaneously, the white fronted, palatial Russian Embassy at 1225 Sixteenth Street announced that the true representatives of the toiling masses should be first in line to greet these sons of the Galaxy proletariat. The rather vague wording of this ukase gave the impression that an Inter-Universal Comintern had been responsible for Earth's rescue by the white globes, and only diplomatic sensitivity had kept them from wearing the hammer and sickle.

A rather feeble, and purely routine, request was filed by the Secretary of the United Nations, on the basis that since this was a world to world visit, didn't somebody think that the United Nations Organization ought to be the one to represent Earth? Just a suggestion, of course.

Nobody seemed to think so.

Norway, Saudi Arabia, Argentina were next to demand appropriate positions. The Ambassador from France was somewhat handicapped in that he didn't know who their Premier was today, and therefore didn't quite know whose name to use, but "Welcome in the name of France" had always been good, and he

didn't intend to let the big powers use this occasion to brand France as a second rate power. Each of the two ambassadors from the Chinas spoke darkly of what would happen if the other were permitted to attend.

Official Washington, and all the nations, were conducting business as usual.

WITHIN the hour, every diplomatic mission in the Capital was hammering at the doors of the State Department, who, by their position, had lifted a considerable part of the load from my shoulders. The missions were being reinforced as fast as planes could empty the United Nations Building in New York and transfer the occupants to Washington.

In final desperation, since there was nothing else to do, appeals even filtered through to the President to make a decision on who should stand where in the reception line. Never one to make a decision anyway, this came at a most inappropriate time, for he hadn't yet decided the much more important question of which Image he wished to Project. For thirty-forty years the country, from election to election, had wavered between the affable but ineffectual Father Image, and the bright but annoying Kid-Brother Image. Should he radiate calm, fatherly indulgence; or should he be sharp and inquisitive?

If Official Washington was confused, Social Washington was more so.

There must be a dinner and formal reception in the evening after the arrival. From the distinguished alleys of Georgetown to the Hunt Club Set of Virginia and Maryland, the battle raged on who would sponsor it.

The social problems posed were stupendous. Who should be invited to the dinner? Should there be multiple dinners? Certainly not, this was no political election gimmick! For once and for all, status levels would be decided by who received invitations. It must be quite exclusive. But should they establish a secondary status level by inviting more people to the reception following the dinner? What about seating arrangements?

What would the Starmen wear? Would they come in smelly uniforms, or would they have black tie, or white tie? What dishes did they prefer?

What about this word going around that the visitors were really green spiders with red eyes running up and down their legs? Just on the chance, should the menu include—ugh—flies?

I suddenly created a new position for Sara. I switched such calls over to the Social Secretary of the Bureau of Extraterrestrial Psychology. She didn't thank me, but she did pick up on it with

considerable more finesse than I had been able to muster.

Gently, firmly, she suggested on the matter of flies, for example, that they wait and see what the visitors really did look like. We didn't really have it on the best authority that they actually were spiders; but if they happened to be, weren't there just oodles and oodles of flies in the slums? And didn't Washington have some of the finest slums in the country? Let the flies wait.

ON THE matter of addressing the Starmen, for example. Your Excellencies? No. How did we know they were excellent? Your Worthy Starshipsires? Awkward, and one simply mustn't be awkward. They finally had to let Sara arbitrate. She ruled a simple Sir should be adequate, until we knew more.

Should the women curtsy to the Spacemen? To spiders, my dear? Better wait on that momentous decision, too.

Now about dress? Wait a minute.

Sara looked over at me. For the moment I was between calls and conferences.

"They want to know how to dress," she said.

"Oh, dammit, Sara," I snapped. "For Chrissake! All right. Let the men wear tails. It'll be symbolic. Let the women dress the way savages dress everywhere—

bedeck themselves in old dead parts of birds and animals, smear their faces with colored clay, mash flowers over themselves to conceal their natural stench. The same way they always dress. Now, for Chrissake!"

"Don't you think it should be formal, really formal?" Sara asked her caller sweetly.

The long, hellish day gradually drew to a close. The intervals between calls grew longer. I looked over at Sara during one of these intervals, and she was crying.

"S'matter, Sara?" I asked.

She looked up at me while she fished in her desk drawer for a tissue.

"Don't they remember last night at all? The courage? The beauty? The purity? You'd think . . ."

"I know," I said. "I'd like to go somewhere and hide, pretend I don't belong to the human race."

She wiped her eyes, and blew her nose.

"When I was a kid," I said, and looked back in memory to a long time ago, "I used to dream about the time when we would meet some other life intelligence face to face. I was pretty innocent, I guess. Because, in that imagining, I always saw man standing straight and proud—and I was so proud of him."

She lay her head down on her desk and sobbed uncontrollably.

THE President, or at least his phalanx of advisers, had made a protocol decision on who should stand where. It was 9:42 A.M. Radio contact with the globe, invisible somewhere out in space and unregistered on any of our tracking equipment, had agreed on 10:00 A.M. as a suitable landing time.

The President stood at the head of a flying wedge of dignitaries. He was flanked on either side by the key Senate and House leaders, appropriately spaced with an eye to the best camera angles. Behind the President, and blocked from view from any direction, stood the Vice-President. Behind them were intermingled some five hundred Congressmen—not really intermingled, since seniority and party affiliation sorted them rigidly, although nobody but Congress would see the order of their standing. In a little group, by itself on one side of the Congress, stood the Cabinet. In a little group, on the opposing side, stood the Supreme Court. To the left stood the leftist country ambassadors, and to the right stood the rightist ambassadors—and if the uncommitted nations didn't know where to stand it served them right that they were left without any special place to stand.

Still farther off to the right, we representatives of the Pentagon stood. I seemed to be the only male in mufti in that contingent. Trouble was, they still hadn't officially given me a rank; and I wasn't sure I would be violating more sensitivities by assuming a uniform not officially mine, or appearing as a civilian. Apparently either way I was damned. Sara, loyally, stood proudly beside me.

"9:42," she said. "Eight minutes. But the globe is nowhere in sight."

"Insects are sluggish until the air warms up," I said, sotto voce. "Maybe 10:00 o'clock was too early."

She didn't bother to smile.

As far as we could see, in any direction, the Mall and all avenues funneling into it were packed with humanity. There was a ceaseless pushing, shoving, elbowing for better view. Each time a new VIP had arrived with police or military escort, those who lost their favored positions in making way fought to regain them. Most had got some sleep, since the night before had been all waking, but many had needed the fortification of alcohol to keep the little burner stoves of their souls alight. The crowd more nearly resembled the peak hour of an Irish clambake than a solemn reception of the first visitors to Earth from another world.

The landing area, itself, was a

huge, slightly irregular rectangle, roped off with movable standards and chains. It stretched Eastward from near the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. The huge statue of Lincoln looked down on the scene, and the face seemed even sadder than usual at the sight.

Helmeted Space Cadets were drawn in parallel ranks just outside the roped area. They stood at Parade Rest, but the polished tubes of their ray guns were thrust outward toward the pressing crowd, silently warning the people not to come any closer unless they wanted to be paralyzed or disintegrated.

I looked at my wristwatch. Another minute had passed. The count down seemed to stretch outward to infinity.

"Maybe the Spacemen will understand," Sara said, as if to comfort me.

"I've been thinking," I murmured. "I'm pretty sure they understand more about us than I'm proud of."

PERHAPS it was my roving eye, I really don't hold with the superstition that we can sense when we are being stared at, but, just the same, I began to look around to see if I could spot that penetrating stare at me once more. I found it.

An enormously fat man was standing with a group of privi-

leged newsmen over on the far side of the President's stance. There was no doubt about it, he was staring directly at me, as if trying to read down into the depths of my soul. It was my first glimpse of Harvey Strickland, although, then, I didn't know who he was. I was that ignorant of what really went on behind the scenes of democratic government.

"What time is it now?" Sara was asking.

"Six more minutes," I answered. The sweep hand of my watch assured me it really was running.

I looked away from Strickland—let him stare—and around the area again. The white marble steps of the Lincoln Memorial were lined with television cameras. More cameras peeked out from the observation windows atop the lofty Washington Monument. They were equipped with the latest lenses to present every detail of the landing in stark closeup, and no doubt the latest vibratory ears to record distant words spoken.

Beyond the official party, reporters with portable units threaded through the teeming crowd, picking up a babble of inane comment. A huckster was shouting, "Space helmets! Space helmets! Get yer soovineer space helments! Only fi' dollars while they last. Get 'em while they last, folks."

"It's three minutes, now," I said to Sara. "And still they're not in sight."

"They'll come," she said. "They're good. They wouldn't hurt us by promising to come, and then not do it."

"Yeah," I said drily. "They're the good ones. I'll bet they wear white hats."

"Sh-h," she whispered. "I understand how you feel, but other people mightn't."

"I don't know how I feel, myself," I said. "So how could you? I just have a terrible dread that this has all been one gigantic hoax, right from the beginning. And if it has been . . ."

The murmur from the crowd drowned out a sentence I didn't know how to finish. First a whisper, then a sudden roar, like fire bursting out of control.

"There it is! There it is!"

AUTOMOBILE horns began to blare across the city. Sirens swelled the volume of sound until ears were deafened. From somewhere out of sight, the Army cut loose with a 24-gun salute. The Marine Corps Band struck up its marching song. The Space Cadets began stamping their feet in their drill march.

I found the globe at last. It seemed to be coming directly out of the sun. Only by closing my eyes to slits could I follow its downward plunge.

And it was coming at unbelievable speed, a daredevil speed straight down at us—a foolhardy stunt speed; a teenage hotrodder manic speed; a showoff speed. Now that its angle was no longer against the sun, I could see its sapphire blue with the radiant star of light gleaming brighter than the sun's rays.

There was a stir in the crowd, that frozen moment before panic. Then, just at the instant when panic might indeed send us all crushing outward into the crowd crushing inward, the globe checked its hurtling descent, its flamboyant stupidity—and settled to the Mall as gently as a fallen leaf.

That impulse which had started up from our assembled guts as a scream of terror changed to a deep and satisfying sigh of awe and wonder.

As the globe settled, touched lightly against the pavement, it spiralled slowly until it presented the thin line rectangle of a closed exit hatch to face the Presidential Party. That group breathed a sigh of relief. Apparently these visitors, whatever they might be like, had enough sense to know who was important. Apparently it wouldn't start out with a faux pas, at least. Apparently the coming could be photographed and presented to the world as it actually happened, instead of being rerun and faked for public

consumption at a later time.

I watched, hardly breathing.

A CURVED gangway materialized out of the side of the ship and dropped into position—gracefully, noiselessly.

The crowd, too, seemed to hold its breath. A long stillness of frozen motion. Only the cameramen seemed to make small movements as they huddled, crouched, aimed their lenses, and waited.

The exit hatch rolled back, and now we could see a blue light glowing softly from the interior of the space ship.

A soft rustle as the crowd seemed to lean forward.

Then the first Spaceman appeared.

He was human, tall, almost six-four, and built like a brick—and perfectly proportioned, beautifully muscled in all the right places. He was handsome with rugged masculinity. He was resplendent in platinum white uniform. Four circles of ebony braid decorated his tunic sleeves. On his left breast were row upon row of gleaming decorations. His shoulder insignia sparkled like diamonds in the morning sunlight. His white military cap, deep visored, was set slightly to one side of his head. On the visor was a radiant star in white gold, set in corruscating fire of a circle of diamonds.

The crowd remained hushed.

Over all the vast assembly there was no sound.

As the first Spaceman stepped down the gangplank, his stride a free and easy thing of strength, his eyes swept the crowd.

Was it imagination that they hesitated a moment on mine?

His eyes swept on around, and then his aquiline, perfectly chiseled features broke into a broad, toothy grin.

Signal for pandemonium. Caught breath, enmasse, was let forth in a gusty roar. Voices broke loose in a cackle of relief. Women began to weep, and scream with fandom adulation. Men hammered their hats into shapeless balls of felt. One small boy, obviously coached, threw a grubby handful of sticky, damp confetti; and in wild hysteria the people began to throw everything loose they had toward the landing field; watches, purses, tie-clips, hats. Most of it landed on the heads of others, slipped down and was trampled underfoot—but never mind.

I stood immobile, expressionless. I think I was the only one not shouting and screaming. Even the President was waving his top hat in the air and shouting what he remembered from a college sports yell.

THE eyes of the grinning Spaceman came back to me, caught me standing immobile.

His expression did not change, but his eyes seemed to question.

"Aren't I doing it right?" he seemed to ask.

But it was too fleeting for me to know. It had all happened during his first two steps down the gangplank.

His two steps ahead, and then, behind him, from the hatch, stepped two more Spacemen, and then two more. They were all dressed the same, except the four had only three ebony circles on their sleeves, some fewer decorations across their breasts, and only the star of white gold, without the circle of diamonds, upon their visors.

All were handsome, strong, virile, proud, beautiful.

There would be no need for feeding in the scullery. No need for Junior League or Junior Chamber of Commerce to go catching flies.

They came all the way down the gangplank in formation. The first Spaceman paused at the bottom, a little shyly, proudly but a little embarrassed.

But then, instead of stepping forward to the President, he made a sharp left turn, and all five of them marched over and came to a halt directly in front of me!

"Take me to your leader!" he said.

I looked at him. And to this day I don't know whether or not

my lip lifted in a sneer. I looked at him, and then I realized that about two billion people were watching this—this charade, this farce. Certainly the eyes of everybody there were staring at us.

I took a deep breath.

"Come with me," I said. "I will take you to our leader."

I stepped up beside him. The four Starship crewmen fell in behind us. As one man, the General Staff from the Pentagon fell in behind them. We marched, with nobody out of step, to where the President was still standing. I halted in front of him.

"This is our leader," I said to the Starman. "Mr. President," I said, "May I present the men who have come from the stars."

At a prod from the House and Senate Leaders, the President took a step forward, doffed his top hat, and smiled his fatuous, vote getting smile.

"Men from the Stars," he rolled sonorously, "Earth welcomes you. Earth thanks you for defeating our enemy."

It wasn't too bad. Some White House speech writer had had enough sense to keep it simple.

The Spacemen listened, their heads bowed modestly, their shoulders square and erect. The First Spaceman took one pace forward, cleared his throat—and blushed!

The crowd was completely silent again.

"Shucks, Mr. President," he said in a West Texas drawl, "It wasn't nothin', really. Wasn't nothin' any red blooded boy in the Right Thinkin' Universe wouldn't have done for his friends!"

He broke into his exuberant grin again; that charming, careless, boyish, handsome, irrepressible, spontaneous grin which can only be achieved after hours upon hours of practice before a mirror.

"We was just lucky, I guess!"

CHAPTER 15

THERE was something wrong with my consistency.

As soon as I grew certain, openly and honestly to myself, that it was all a gigantic hoax, I grew equally certain that it wasn't. Admittedly there was no Earth power, no mentality, no equipment, no facilities and no foolhardiness so great as to produce this hoax. That they had come from the stars I could not doubt. That they had deliberately hoaxed us I could not doubt. That they must have some alien motive for doing this I could not doubt.

And the more normal these slaphappy flyboys appeared to be, the wilder the acclaim and adulation of official and social Washington, and the world, the more I doubted them.

They were not, surely they could not be what they seemed. Then what were they? Why and how had they so completely adopted Hollywood's entirely spurious idea of what a hero should be? To conceal what?

To look through the eyes of what might logically be assumed the surveillance of an alien life intelligence, I might not be proud of Man (he gave me little cause); but Man was, nonetheless, my own. For better or for worse, I was on his side.

I longed to talk to someone about it, but as the day progressed I found no kinship doubt in any other eyes. I was one attending a suburban social who must tailor his tastes and opinions to public relations lest he give offense by seeming a minority.

Not even Sara was with me, not this time. There had been no doubt in her eyes, the last time I'd seen her before the crowd separated us at the Mall. Her eyes were star sapphires.

Unpracticed as I was in Washington's diplomatic courtesies, I found myself quickly shuffled, shouldered and edged away from the favored position the Starmen had given me at the Mall. Yet, to my astonishment, I found myself in the third car behind them in the parade on its way to the Blair House across from the White House. I learned only later

that it was Shirley, who did know Washington, working behind the scenes, who not only saw to it that I got a seat in that car but who laid down the law to every host and hostess in Washington that one Doctor Ralph Kennedy must be hurriedly added to their exclusive lists. Only later did I learn that the servants and office staff members are the real social and political arbiters of Washington—everybody else is too green and inexperienced to know.

Both official and social Washington, after some cautious inquiry of their own servants, accepted Shirley's judgement. Word was passed around (and my status grew in the telling) that I was the world's foremost authority on extraterrestrial psychology. . . . Adviser to the Pentagon . . . you noticed, didn't you, that the Spacemen picked him out to introduce them to the President, and they're certainly All Right . . . therefore he must be, too. . . .

It seemed not to occur to anyone (else) to wonder how the Spacemen had known all this about me immediately upon landing—me standing there among all that resplendent brass and braid without so much as a good conduct medal.

IT WAS while driving from one welcoming function to another in the late afternoon of the first

day that I made first mental contact with them. Unhappily, it was my last for quite some time. This time, through Shirley's influence, I had been given the seat beside the secret service man who was driving their open car through the crowded streets. We were driving through a wild demonstration of celebrity worship. Bex, Dex, Jex, Kex and Lex, seated in the rear of the car were busy grinning handsomely, smirking and occasionally saluting the crowd.

"You're setting us back a hundred years," I grumbled sourly, while I tried to look both brilliant and happy for the cameras, myself. "Here we've been telling our young people that the real hero of tomorrow is a Thinking Man; that to meet the challenge of the future they've got to develop their Intellect beyond studying out how to heat before they eat, how to obey road signs, how to distinguish between rest rooms. How far do you think we're going to get now, after the example you've set?" It was subvocal grumbling; no point in revealing myself to the secret service as a subversive.

We were still bowing and smiling to the crowds lining the street, but I forgot myself long enough to swallow hard on a doubletake at their answer. They did not speak it, but it was clear and sharp.

"The prevailing art forms of a culture invariably give the common denominator of its direction. In yours we find no such cultural ideal as you express."

It was the first thought they'd uttered which couldn't have been lifted bodily from the script of *Git Along Doggie*, or *Biff Swift*, *Space Detective*.

And it was impersonal, emotionless—as remote from approval or rebuke as a spiral galaxy.

There went my consistency again. Oddly, somehow, it made me feel better. At least they weren't really what they seemed—cowboys taken from some distant world's Western Plains, dressed up in fancy uniforms and taught to press some buttons. There was intellect behind those false fronts.

I felt a twinge of fear. So far they had taken utmost care not to harm any human life—but only so far.

They gave me no more contact. They were much too busy playing up to the crowds lining the streets. And why? Why were they working so hard to be popular? Why were they giving us such a liberal helping of what we obviously had hoped to find in them? Or were they sampling each mind as we passed? With the same ease in sampling mine? And finding? For what were they searching?

Too bad our scientists would all be back at the Mall, attempting to measure, guess the weight and composition of an entranceless, seamless globe. And I still wonder if their instruments told them there wasn't anything there—or if the instruments, too, were subject to illusion.

And I wonder, too, if the police department wasn't secretly relieved when the ship, in mid-afternoon, suddenly disappeared; releasing the cordons of police so they could go back to their normal occupation of attempting to entice ordinary people into committing crimes so they could entrap them more conveniently.

NOW it was 3:00 o'clock in the morning. At the dinners and receptions the human males had worn their symbolic tails, the females had shown off the old dead scraps skinned from slaughtered rodents to display the hunting prowess of their males in the widows and orphans fleecing marts or under the graft table. The social events symbolizing the progress of a flowering civilization were over for the night. Even the stench of perfumes, so fragrant in the bottle and jar, so foetid as they oxidize and mix with sweat and decaying scales of skin, was being carried away on the cool night breeze.

The Star Heroes lounged around in one of the more inti-

mate reception rooms of Blair House, theirs for their stay, while they relaxed before going to bed. Their long legs were thrown up over the arms of chairs, their cigarette ashes dropped carelessly upon priceless rugs, their corrosive night caps etched rings upon rare tabletops.

They seemed not to know about spyray units, microphones and cameras concealed behind mouldings, under chairs, in electrical outlets, through minute openings punched through eye pupils of masterpiece paintings on the wall, through false mirrors placed strategically to cover every square foot of Blair House.

They seemed unaware that a couple billion people would be treated to their every private move and word.

The secret services, the super secret services, the spies who spy upon the spies, wherever a human body could be squeezed into false wall passages, locked closets, basements, attics and houses next door, all these watched, recorded and photographed for later analysis. They had begun with narrowed, suspicious eyes, they had savored each remark for hidden, subversive meanings, and gradually they, too, became convinced that these astronauts were, indeed, what they claimed to be—pure and simple representatives from the Right Thinking Universe.

I did my own share of listening, viewing, analyzing and wondering, and found I really didn't have the Peeping Tom temperament required for this work. My status as the world's foremost authority on extraterrestrial psychology gave me access to the various observing units, but after sampling the behavior of the Starmen, the cloud of avidity radiating from the observers drove me outside, onto the lawn, to clear my lungs with the night's cool breeze.

But not an empty lawn or street. Even at this hour of pre-dawn, and after nights of sleeplessness, still there were crowds of people standing outside of Blair House stolidly watching, staring at lighted rectangles of windows blanked by closed blinds or even blanker walls.

I WALKED among the silent, staring people, and was on the point of deciding to find some transportation to my hotel when the dark figures of the crowd began to stir, and a low murmur arose from them. I turned and looked at the spot which seemed to have drawn all their eyes.

It was one of the upper balconies which let through french doors into a bedroom. It began with a glow, a vague nimbus of pearly light.

The throaty murmur around me was one of awe.

A form began to take shape within the brightening nimbus of light. At first it was ghostly, symbolizing immateriality. It began to clear, take shape. Now it was a human form. The arms came up and out. The white robe draped the figure and flowed from the extended arms. A face emerged from the nimbus of the head, a Flemish face, with hair long, and blonde, and draped in ringlets about the shoulders. The robe glistened now as finest nylon. A halo began to glow about the head.

Then it was gone.

The balcony was dark and blank.

The crowd had buckled at the knees. Some were lying prone upon the ground. I looked back up at the balcony angrily.

"Now what are you practical jokers up to?" I asked bitterly.

CHAPTER 16

THE Miracle at Blair House, as it came to be called, gave Harvey Strickland the assurance he needed.

He sat, the next morning, in his purple robe at his desk in the suite of offices reserved for him at the Washington Evening Bulletin, and weighed the discrepancies in the vision against their purpose.

Nylon robe, indeed! His first response to this item in the re-

porters' stories had been fury at the sloppy thinking, and some of his reporters came closer than they ever knew to excommunication from the fourth estate. But then he grew curious at the unanimous opinion that the robe was nylon. Odd.

Odd, also, that a halo was universally reported. Painters didn't invent the halo for several centuries after the time of Christ. And it was some centuries still more before the anti-Semitic Nordic painters changed the physical appearance to one they liked better. Just as the approved image which came to be accepted had nothing whatever in common with the probably dark and swarthy little Asiatic Jew, so did Christianity evolve into something which had nothing whatever in common with that servile little Jew's teachings.

So what motive in presenting this wholly inaccurate vision?

The goddam Communists had said religion was the opiate of the people. As usual, they were so twisted in their thinking they had even misinterpreted this. Christianity was the most powerful weapon rulers had ever found for keeping the people meek, docile, humble, subservient, asking nothing, expecting nothing, fearing even that if they asked for their rights here on Earth, they might be denied

them in Heaven. This was the reason the ancient rulers had shrewdly adopted it as a state policy; this was the reason the modern industrialist enforced it upon his employees, and saw to it that the ministers in his factory towns kept the workers humble, docile and afraid.

Suddenly he felt flooded with revelation. The Miracle at Blair House had been their sign to him. "We approve the method of scaring the sheep into submission," they were saying to him. "We see that there is altogether too goddam much independent thinking going on, and it's time the people were brought back into line."

He pushed his huge bulk to his feet and began to pace the space between the desk and the doorway, while he thought out the implications behind the act. From their behavior these five had seemed no more than stupid flyboys, the kind of happy-go-lucky show-offs we might send out after we had taught them to press the right buttons. Maybe they were, maybe they weren't. Maybe there was more to them than met the eye, or maybe this was just another button they had been ordered to push, part of a long range pattern.

It didn't really matter which. Whether they'd thought it up, or it had been thought up for them, the intended result was clear.

Here lately there'd been a rash of independent little literary magazines, operating on a shoestring, with appeal to only a few goddam intellectuals. He'd paid them no attention. Those things usually died out after two or three issues and the backers saw that they hadn't changed the destiny of mankind with a couple of editorials. But the rash of them was symptom of increase in independent thinking. Worse, there were mutterings among the scientists that came close to mutiny. Goddam scientists were getting too big for their britches. They were forgetting they were just hired mechanics, and were trying to tell the bosses how the shop ought to be run.

HE whirled around and slapped his hand down hard.

That was the deal!

Lest this give anybody ideas about science being more important than sheeplike docility, this arrival of men from the stars, the people were to be reminded of the pasture fences and who drives them with the dogs and whip.

Well, they didn't have to hit Harvey Strickland over the head. Now that they had shown him that either they, or the power behind them, knew the score; he'd play their game. Sooner or later, there'd be a showdown of hands across the table—or under it.

HE wheezed his high, gasping laughter, went around the desk, sat back down in the triple strength chair, and began punching buttons to summon his editorial staff. He grabbed up his phone, called his New York suite, and ordered Miller to come on the next plane.

He hadn't wanted Miller with him while he was uncertain of his course. It wouldn't do for Miller to know he could be uncertain. But now that he knew, Miller must be here to see. He would have considered it complete nonsense if any psychologist had told him Miller, to him, was symbolic of humanity; and that the same jealousy and hatred which had driven him to destroy Miller pressured his drive to humble the contemptible human race.

That its determined, eternal, beautiful effort to lift its head in pride, in spite of all his efforts and those down through the ages like him to keep it servile and cowardly, was embodied in Miller. Even if he had contemplated the idea, he would have rejected it, for obviously Miller had been completely broken, by him, long ago.

He would not have admitted, nor known, either of the human race, nor of Miller, that the spark of man's desire to lift himself up out of the muck, to throw back his head and gaze in ecstasy up to the stars, is never quenched.

More immediately, it did not occur to him that his secretary, so self effacing as to be often forgotten, as a good organization man should, had, ignored, stood by his shoulder once too often and watched him work the secret combination to his file room of dossiers.

That Miller had used his absence from New York, and the excitement of the rest of the New York personnel in its absorption with the doings of the Starmen, to spend long hours in that secret room.

That Miller had finally found his own dossier, and had read its every word with increasingly comprehending eyes.

That the dormant spark of pride in Miller had been given the fuel to flame into a raging fire.

CHAPTER 17

IT WAS Shirley again, with her manipulations behind the scenes, who filled my following days with woe.

Who had a better right to act as intermediary between the Starmen and the deputations and committees of Earthmen than Dr. Ralph Kennedy, the world's foremost authority on extraterrestrial psychology? True, the State Department, Commerce Department and Civil Space authority voiced loud protests, but

Shirley solved all this by the simple, and thoroughly familiar to Washington, means of "transmitting orders from above"—without revealing who gave those orders up above. She simply told the guards around Blair House to admit no one but me.

Not even Harvey Strickland would be permitted to see the Starmen without securing my approval!

Trouble was, since I'd had no further contact with the Starmen, myself, I was hardly in position to start filling their calendar with dates from all the pressing deputations, committees, and individuals.

I found myself curiously reluctant to step out into the spotlight, for now the entire world sat staring at its television set which showed the entrance of Blair House and the milling crowds outside the cordon of guards.

So, the Space Cadets could escort me, and make a path through the crowds. So, the guards, upon proper identification, would allow me through the lines. So there I would be, walking up the steps, alone. Watched by two billion people. So I would knock on the door. So I would say, "Please Mr. Starmen, may I come in?"

What if they said, "No!"?

Goddam you Shirley, you and your empire building.

I DELAYED putting it to a test as long as I could. My excuse was that I must sample the reactions of the press and television to the Miracle at Blair House.

The Strickland organization had gone all out. "Down on your knees, you stupid slaves," was the gist. "Grovel your silly faces in the dust. Lo! we have been given the sign."

The more I read the angrier I grew. Not only at Strickland, his motives were becoming pretty clear to me. Not just at the fanatics who were all too willing to jump on the bandwagon to increase their importance and their compulsion to destroy all who didn't acknowledge their ascendancy. But at the Starmen, themselves. What were they trying to do to us?

My anger supplied the necessary adrenalin to get me on my feet and going.

I was admitted through the lines and into Blair House by the Captain of the Guards.

I did not knock on the door, shuffle my feet, pull my forelock, make a steeple out of my hands and pray for admittance. I simply pushed open the door and walked inside. I had considered that they might throw me out bodily, feet flying over head down the steps, with two billion people watching my disgrace, but by now I didn't care.

Instead, I was received with that exasperating, "Shucks, Doctor Kennedy, we're just plain folks. You shouldn't ought to go to all this trouble, a busy man like you, just to see if we're makin' out all right."

They were scattered around the breakfast room, in dressing gowns. They were having morning coffee—black; served by the regular servants assigned to Blair House. Their faces were designed to reflect the morning after the night before.

My disgust with them increased, but I was stopped in my impulse to say what I thought by the knowledge of the spyways, microphones and cameras.

"Funny thing about them gadgets," one of the Spacemen drawled, as a dark man in a white coat, who possessed far more dignity than I, seated me and gave me coffee. "Sometime during the night them gadgets all went out of commission. Them noises you hear behind the walls, I reckon they'r not rats—just electronic engineers tryin' to figger out what went wrong."

• That much was a relief. But the joker's stupid country boy accent and attitude wasn't. I'd caught that highly revealing flash about "cultural art forms" the day before, and they must have known I'd caught it. So they must also know that I wasn't taken in by their false faces.

So now why the masquerade?
With me?

I didn't know what their game was. I knew only that so long as they maintained this farce, I wouldn't find out. I'm afraid I boiled over, as soon as the servants had left the room.

YOU come in lies and deceit," I said, and was surprised to find I was speaking in cold, measured words instead of hot stammering. "I shouldn't be surprised to learn that you are also self-righteous, knowing what is good for us. And knowing that, capable of any atrocity upon us."

There was a blur of faces and forms. For an instant, there was no one in the room with me. Only a vortice of faint, violet light. Then the room was populated again. The boys were still lounging around with coffee cups in their hands. But their faces were not the stupid duh faces of Earth heroes. There was the faint glow of a nimbus around them.

It shook me. What kind of fool was I? To stir up what? All right! The worst they could do was blast me out of existence for blasphemy. And that might be preferable to living in the kind of world their behavior was going to create. Their faces were symbols of curiosity now, a wordless invitation for me to go on.

"The most despicable of all human traits, the most cruel and

mean, is self-righteousness, the belief that there is some special virtue in ourselves which enables us to decide what is best for others. It provides excuse for anything we may want to do in the destruction of others. We know it well. We should. We've had plenty of experience with it. We know it in all its stages of progression. We know it is a contagion and an addiction. We know it to be worse than any narcotic habit, for it can only feed upon forbidding and condemning others in ever increasing doses; to increase its own self approval.

"You come to us in lies and deceit. You probably have even rationalized already that such lies and deceit are for our own good—the first stage of addiction to self-righteousness. You are, even now, probably trying to decide what is best for us. Your behavior seems to indicate you already think you know what is good for us. When will you go into the next stage of self righteousness and start punishing us for not behaving the way you think we should?"

Again the blur, again the violet glow of whirlpool, again the curious faces around me. There was no country-boy drawl when one of them spoke.

WHEN one of your biologists wishes to study a life form," he said in emotionless tones, "He

first tries to measure all the elements in its environment. But this study does not reveal to him the tolerances of variation in that life form, nor does it reveal the potentials he suspects may be hidden within it. He enters the medium in which the culture exists, by, let us say, increasing the temperature, changing the chemical compound slightly, altering the environment to determine the potentials of reaction in the life form. He probably hasn't the slightest concern, at this point, for what is "good" for the life form, or "bad" for it. He simply wants to know what it is, how it behaves, how it might behave."

"And," I interrupted, this time a little hotly, "If he finds out we don't like it, we set about finding a way to destroy it."

They hit me then.

Oh not with a brawny hero's sadistic fists. They did not gun me down with impunity and praise because they were on the right side.

They hit me with a vision.

I saw the universe as I had never before conceived it. For an instant I knew the vastness of infinity, the trillions and quadrillions of whirling dead worlds, a vastness of emptiness so overwhelming that the mind cannot grasp the whole of it—and lifeless.

Only here and there, in such

pitifully small quantities as to be only a trace element was there life in any form—and, of that, an even tinier amount evolved to self awareness.

And then I saw Earth; with its surface teeming, crawling, squirming with multitudes and myriads of life forms; each in life/death struggle with all the rest for survival and room to grow. No wonder, to us, life was cheap. No wonder, to us, the way to win was destruction of our opposition. Our values were formed on a world where there was too much life for the space it could occupy.

Their values were formed by a universe almost totally devoid of life—where every scrap of it was so precious that its right to survive must transcend all else, the right to be must transcend the difference in being.

They did not know which was the Right form of life, and which the Wrong form. Such concepts had no meaning. They did not know which should become ascendant and which should be suppressed; for they did not know what the future destiny of life, any kind of life, was to be. They did not know it of us, they did not know it of themselves. They did not know of any right to harm us; or we, coming out to the stars, to harm them.

They did not know.

I did not know how or when I

left them there in the breakfast room—again appearing to be duh loafers sprawled around sipping morning coffee.

THEY tell me that while I was there, for something like an hour, the crowds had massed in increasing numbers, to press tighter and tighter against the cordon of guards. They tell me that when I came out of the door, the crowd, which had been growing noisier, hushed. They tell me I walked as one in a trance. They tell me that even Strickland, purple faced near apoplexy in his argument with the guards, demanding admittance, fell silent, and clamped his lips in a thin line. They tell me that as I walked through the line, my eyes were fixed on something out of this world, and that the crowd, somehow, pushed back to open a path for me—wide enough that none touched me.

They tell me that, on the outskirts of the crowd, I stepped into the first limousine I reached—which wasn't mine—and that the chauffeur, without a word, closed the door and drove me straight to the Pentagon.

I came to, sitting at my desk, with Sara telling me that the deputations of politicians, business men, and even some scientists were still waiting for me to tell them when they were scheduled to interview the Starmen.

I shook my head, as if coming out of a sleep.

"I don't know," I said vaguely. "I didn't think to arrange anything."

"But, boss," she wailed. "You have no idea what we've been going through trying to stall off those people! It's been a deluge. Everybody demanding . . ."

"To hell with all of them!" I said.

MEANWHILE, back at the office, things had not stood still.

I had no more than introduced the Starmen to the President than Central Personnel suddenly discovered that somehow it had made the mistake of cutting my employee requisitions in half, and that in view of my obvious change in status the credit they might receive for all that money they were saving the taxpayers might measure somewhat less than the blame for not giving me the help I asked. They hurriedly rectified this by sending more than a thousand new employees to us, in one day's time—each carrying a Back-Order reference to a given requisition.

Shirley was fit to be tied. But she arose to the occasion by appealing to Dr. Kibbie for assistance in finding still more space to hold them and orienting them to their new jobs. Apparently he was willing and eager to help,

and to offer the help of all his other departments as well. We were making use of that two billion very nicely, and he had received word from a Congressional Committee that even though Congress was not officially in session all members were in town, and if we needed any more spending money they could get some of the boys together within an hour. Dr. Kibbie did not refuse. Shirley's request for him to take on some of the burdens, and actually do some work around here, came as a boon to him.

Mine was the department where the spotlight was shining. He was only too glad for the opportunity to move back into the spotlight, after he had flubbed earlier chances so miserably. If it seemed that I had started out working for him and now he was working for me—well, that's Washington.

Shirley had done a couple other things to pull the reins of control tightly into our hands. Telephone switchboards were removed from Blair House and all calls were routed through our office, or rather, stopped at our office. All mail and telegrams were routed to our office. She closed off every approach to the Starmen except through us—through me.

Dr. Gerald Gaffee, the second member of my original staff of

three, was not far behind her. He, too, in his own field, had become the man of the hour; and arose to its challenge. With a singular lack of self doubt and conflict, which usually keeps the intellectual impotent to accomplish anything, he drafted every available scientist to assist him in calculating the probable civilization of these Starmen to pad out the bales of news releases demanded of us; for page after page and hour after hour of print and discussion must be filled. There was no news of any other kind worth printing or talking about.

THE scientists were delighted. As rapidly as they could, they turned off their Bunsen burners, cooled their retorts, balanced their equations, set aside their drawings, and flocked to his aid. When he matched them credential for credential, hauteur for hauteur, they fell to work with a sigh of deep satisfaction. Accustomed as they were to being low man on the totem pole, bottom of the status barrel, victims of every vagrant breeze that blew in cultural whims; they had grown practice in seizing every fleeting opportunity to add a little more to mankind's knowledge of the world and universe about him before a change in whim cut them off at the pockets, or a new program of anti-science in the

culture quietly eliminated them.

A skilled archeologist, finding the fragment at the site dig, can deduce an entire culture from a single shard. To do this, they must have known that. To know that could only happen after they had progressed through these and these stages of cultural growth. Buried at this level, in this climatic condition, required this much passage of time. Or, finding this shard at this site, instead of half way around the world where it should have been found, presupposed an intercontinental trade among these earlier people, which, in turn, measured the level of civilization they had attained. All from a piece of shard—and astonishingly accurate in estimate, when later discoveries come to light. (Or, are later discoveries rearranged to confirm the first?)

Here they had no isolated shard. They had had days of watching, first the discs, then the globes, the battle with its incredible denials of the laws of inertia, the globe which had come to rest briefly at the Mall before it suddenly disappeared, the shape and clothing of the occupants—the speech of the occupants which they must have learned from a Western movie television wave trapped by their instruments, the correct (well, insofar as West Texas speech can be considered correct) se-

mantic meanings to the words they had uttered. Here was such an abundance of observation and evidence that deduction was mere child's play—at least deduction at the level understandable to the people.

Their scientific deductions even brought them dangerously close to the forbidden areas of the humanities. For they deduced two massive galaxial civilizations strung out among the stars and galaxies of stars, at war, one Evil, one Good.

The discs were Evil, because they had threatened us. The Globes were Good, because they had saved us. The scientists fell into the humanities routine of morals and ethics without even knowing they had done it.

They did not go on to spell out that mankind's morals and ethics are based solely in expediency and have no other source of origin; that which favors his survival is Good; that which threatens his survival is Evil. The universe was created around man, for his benefit and no other purpose. It surrounds him, he is at its center, and all things in it relate to him in terms of Good, or Evil. In the humanics man is still in the Ptolemaic age and has not yet reached, or come close, to that level of rational thinking where a humanic Copernicus can emerge.

And therefore the scientists

bought themselves a few more days of toleration from the humanists, by, once again, not challenging the arbiters of right and wrong.

THESE bales of news handouts kept reporters and commentators off our necks for the moment. But the insistence of other deputations, each with its own expedient fish to fry, was growing in volume and number.

Oddly, there were no church deputations. Perhaps the churchmen prefer their miracles be kept long ago and far away. Perhaps that bogus miracle at Blair House filled them with dread that the Judgement Day was at hand—a Judgement Day few of them really believed would ever come, when they would be called to account for what they had done with that stewardship handed to them so long ago. At least, so went the comment around the department when the absence of such deputations was realized.

One other little development of a minor nature had also been making progress. With incredible speed, work and skill, which can only come through complete dedication and psychotic drive, N-462 had now completed his proof that I was not the real Dr. Ralph Kennedy (who was still teaching a vague class at a vaguer college somewhere in the

mid-west, and never knowing how much he was missing just because some clerk in Space Navy got the files mised up), but only a Mr. Ralph Kennedy, an impostor.

Following the accustomed police pattern he calculated the various avenues of advantage to himself, brought the proof of my imposture to me first—and held out his hand.

"Hell!" I exclaimed after I'd looked it over. "I'm not going to pay hush on a half cooked job like this. If you'd used more sense and less venom you'd have checked Space Navy, Personnel Department, Section of Files beginning with the letter K. There you'd have found a recording of my telephone call, which I made when I first got their letter telling me they'd court martial me if I didn't show up in forty-eight hours. You'd have found I told them and told them that I was the wrong man.

"If you'd interviewed the people I saw, in person, after I got here, and used the proper thumb screws and rubber hoses in the approved police manner, they'd have finally admitted that I told them again and again I was the wrong man.

"They're the ones who made the mistake. They're the ones who insisted. They're the ones who threatened me into taking the job. I know how we're sup-

posed to tremble when you look in our direction, I know how easy and how often you cook the evidence to suit your whims, but I'm not going to pay off on a lousy job like this."

I KNOW who will pay off," he said. He tried to bully me with his eyes. "The Strickland reps have already approached me, and about half the rest of the people in your department, trying to get something on you. They'll pay plenty for this."

"Sell it," I answered instantly. "Don't pass up your big chance, man. Meantime, I'll ask the Starmen if it makes any difference to them whether I'm a Doctor or a Mister. If they don't want me as their go-between you've got yourself a big deal. But if they do want me—well, I don't know if you'd noticed, but I saw what they could do to their enemies."

His eyes were no longer cold and bargaining. He fled.

That left, of the central corps, only Sara to bully me about not making any appointments with the Starmen—a job any secretary ought to be able to do. Certainly the world's foremost authority on Extraterrestrial Psychology ought to be able . . .

"Awright, Sara!" I finally snapped back. "Stop nagging. We're not married yet, you know!"

Her eyes grew big.

Come to think of it, I guess that's something else I hadn't thought to take care of when I should.

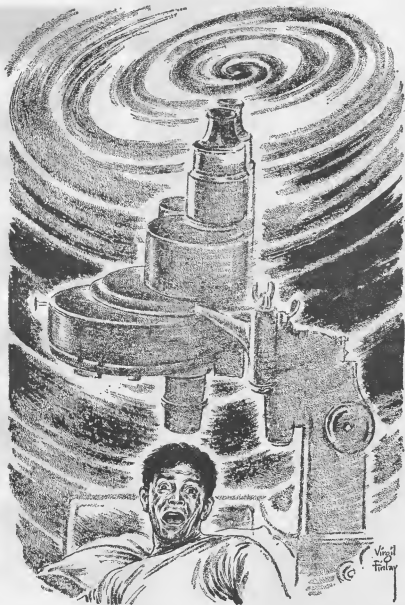
CHAPTER 19

I MIGHT stand on the smear slide and shake my fist in resentment at the eye looking down through the microscope at us, but it had no apparent effect on the biologists who were stirring up our environment to test the potentials of our reaction.

The next exasperating move of the Starmen was reported on the television set in my office. I'd left the thing turned on because even my brief visit with them had given me another perspective. Now I was looking at the antics of the human race as they might appear to a detached, alien mind in curious observation.

Out of nowhere the star sapphire globe suddenly appeared again, this time over the street in front of Blair House. There was panic pressure in the crowds of people directly beneath it, but the perimeter crowds were pressing inward to get closer this time. They could not move out of its path of descent.

I watched in apprehension mixed with some sardonic satisfaction. This time the Starmen, those lovable boys, Bex, Dex, Jex, Kex and Lex, must reveal that the globe was an unsubstantial



Virgil
Finlay

illusion, or they must crush the people beneath and violate their own precepts of not harming another life form.

They solved their dilemma, but not mine, by performing another miracle. I might have known they'd not hesitate to impress the yokels with their magic.

They came through the doorway of Blair House, again dressed in their resplendent uniforms, again with those irrepressible boyish grins on their handsome faces. They grouped together there at the entrance. The crowd fell silent. The leader, I suppose it was Bex, spoke familiarly with the crowd.

"Folks," he said, and without seeming 'strain his voice reached the outermost limits of the crowd, "I reckon we oughta clear up a little mistake we made. The other day that recording we played said we was here as ambassadors. Well, shucks, we're not. I guess, back on our world, ambassador means something different from here. We didn't know we'd be insultin' anybody by not meetin' with all the ambassadors from all your countries.

"And we're not in any position to make any deals with anybody about anything. So that's why we asked Mr. Kennedy not to put us down for talks with all you people of importance."

(They came in lies and deceit. They hadn't asked me any such thing. The matter hadn't even come up. Still, I breathed a sigh of relief.)

"You might say," Bex continued to sell his winsome personality. "Instead of being ambassadors, we're more like—well, tourists. We don't want to disappoint nobody, but that's kinda what we'd like to do a little more of.

WE'RE gonna tour around now, to see a little more of this beautiful world of yours; that is, if you don't mind. We figger we oughta see the country a little before we go back home. Maybe we can figger out how to give you a helping hand here and there. You might say we're a kind of Youth Peace Corps—in a small way, that is.

"We want to thank you for the nice reception and the nice parties you gave us yesterday, but we hope it won't hurt nobody's feelin's if we hafta turn down any more invitations. We're not used to all this celebratin', we're just plain fightin' men.

"You keep in touch with Mr. Ralph Kennedy at the Pentagon about us, he's a mighty fine fella, and we certainly appreciate all the valuable time he's given us. We'll keep in touch with him too, long as we're visitin' here on your fine world.

"We'll be back before we hafta go home. So long, now."

A RAINBOW suddenly sprang out of the side of the hovering globe and placed its end at their feet. They marched up the rainbow and entered a hatch which opened at their approach. The blue glow from within the ship was cut off as the hatch closed again.

And there was no ship there.

Some claimed stoutly that they were able to follow its incredible speed up into the heavens, some confused specks before their eyes with the dot of the globe disappearing into the blue.

I had an idea it was something else; some movement perfectly normal to the experimenting biologist, inconceivable to the germs on the smear slide. But why bother to explain themselves to the germs? To keep the environment as "natural" as possible, within controlled conditions, changing only those things they wished to alter?

Personally, I wished they'd make up their minds. What were they? Ambassadors, tourists, fightin' men, Youth Peace Corpsmen? Each role required a different response from us, each label carried its own set of expected behaviors.

This was a question I felt Dr. Gerald Gaffee and his phalanx of semanticists might wish to pon-

der. He and I had grown friendlier since that first meeting, and when I walked into his office this time, I was a little surprised that the original icy hauteur was back. The two scientists with him, both of international renown, looked at me with open hostility. Then I realized.

Twice the Starmen had referred to me in this latest speech of theirs, and both times as Mister. I was a Mister who had been posing as a Doctor. I was beneath contempt. Nothing was said, of course. Nothing needed be.

I had made up my mind to tell them, before they went out on the limb too far in the speculations of these Good and Evil Galaxial Civilizations, that they'd better also take into consideration that the whole thing had been a staged illusion. I changed my mind now. I knew from experience that anything a layman might say could not possibly be credited.

And, anyway, what difference would it make to the biologist what one germ on the smear slide thought of another?

"Never mind," I told him, and walked out without mentioning why I had interrupted their important conference in the first place.

WE heard nothing from the Starmen, or no reports of

their whereabouts, for two days. This didn't mean we heard nothing about them. There was page after page, hour after hour of hash and rehash.

The newest miracle of Walking on a Rainbow stirred and disturbed us even more than the balcony scene that first night at Blair House.

Now, for the first time, we took public note that in the battle between the Globes and Discs there had been no debris to fall upon us. It was another miracle.

That the discs had almost won, then suddenly turned coward and fled was a miracle.

That our tracking equipment and scientific instruments generally had failed to work, failed to confirm what our eyes and noses, our ears and tactile senses had told us was real—this was a miracle.

"First thing you know," I said sourly to Sara, "We'll be like the mountain Indians of Latin America. A tourist drives through a village at the break-neck speed of fifteen miles an hour and doesn't kill anybody. It is a miracle. The sun shines through a rift in the clouds and lights up a mariposa lily on the hillside. It is a miracle. A man wakes up in the morning, after he has dreamed he was dead. He is alive. It is a miracle."

She looked at me without committing herself.

"Accept as basic premise that by individual whim we can suspend the natural law of the entire universe, and anything you want to name becomes a miracle." I said.

"What natural law would you use to walk on a rainbow?" she asked me.

"Now, Sara," I chided. "That's like saying, 'If you're so smart why ain't you rich?'. Hell, I don't know all the natural laws there are. Nobody on Earth does. Maybe the Starmen know some natural laws we don't know, and maybe they don't know all there are either. But that doesn't mean because we don't know the natural law, there isn't one."

"So you believe in natural laws you don't understand, and others believe in miracles they don't understand—and what's the difference?"

"We can never understand the miracle. Someday we can understand the natural law. That's the difference."

"The miracle is easier," she said lightly. "Think of all the scientific study you have to do to understand natural law."

"Oh, Sara," I groaned. "You, too?"

"So what kick do you get out of being such a cynic?" she asked. "If we want miracles, what's wrong with miracles?"

I started to answer with the old bromide, "Only the broken

hearted idealist can become a cynic," but it sounded too corny and too complicated.

IN two days, a new series of miracles began.

The biologists began to mess up the culture they were studying in earnest. First news came from Western United States. From Austin, Texas, to the barren shores of the Pacific in Baja California, and upward to the badlands of the Dakotas and on upward into Canada, subterranean streams of water geysered to the surface overnight. The water was as fresh as that from mountain springs. It was seeping into the desert lands, flowing through the arroyos, forming lakes in box canyons, forming its own interwoven network of irrigation ditches. Within weeks the entire desert would be green with growing plants. Within a year, it would become rich farm land.

Let the Agriculture Department groan about its already too expensive surplus crops. It was a miracle.

Only the lag in communications, caused by lines clogged with diplomatic recriminations for our hogging the Starmen all to ourselves and trying to extend Yankee Imperialism to the entire universe, prevented us from knowing at once that the desert regions all over the Earth were receiving like treatment.

News came from the Sahara region next, then the Arabian desert, the parched plains of India, then the Gobi. Australia was furious for being treated as if she were down under until suddenly her whole interior became a network of canals, streams and lakes.

Brazil was in the act of complaining that just because she had no deserts was no reason why she should be deprived of her share of miracles when word came that the vast Amazon region had been penetrated with networks of clearings and highways to checkerboard her many thousands of square miles of jungle. Almost in the manner of mycelium growth, the clearings spread up into Central America and momentarily stopped those people from shaking angry fists toward the North and South. Interior Africa and the jungles of Southern Asia next reported.

Russia was reaching new heights of bad manners until she noticed that the snows of Siberia were melting to release more millions of square miles where more comrade workers could refuse to grow enough grain to feed the toiling masses who had little personal incentive to toil. Greenland, Canada and the State of Alaska hardly had time to draft protests before the same phenomena caused them to tear up the drafts.

There was a week of this. Hardly more than enough time for the land speculators to recast their investment programs to cash in on these profitable miracles. Hardly time for people to start packing their goods for the biggest land rush in all history—hardly time for governments to pass laws telling the people they couldn't do it, not until the land investors had got set for profit taking. Hardly time for Russia to wonder where she would send her variant thinkers now that Siberia was a potential paradise. Hardly more than time for us in the Pentagon to do more than keep statistics on authenticated and rumored miracles.

IF Economists expressed alarm over the disruption of normal trade, if Scientists expressed alarm at the potential ocean level rise because of all these melting snows, nobody heeded. Economists are about as accurate as weather forecasters or horse race handicappers, and who pays any attention to scientists when there are miracles?

United States did find time to do a little muttering in Uncle Sam's beard. Figured on an area for area basis, certain other countries were receiving more miracles per square miles than we; and was that fair? Of course we were still ahead on a per cap-

ita basis—and so how you looked at it depended on whether you wanted to complain or brag.

Yes, indeed, the Starmen were varying the chemistry of the culture on the smear slide.

I looked at these changes with dread. They were so vast, with consequences beyond imagining—while man can tolerate only the smallest of change at any one time.

. . . It took a thousand years, fifteen hundred years, of placing the holy image exactly in the center of the canvas before man could tolerate the blasphemy of placing it slightly to one side.

. . . For seventeen hundred years Ptolemy's astronomic system of placing the Earth at the center of the universe satisfied the vanity of man, including his astronomers, before the courage of Copernicus to say it might not be so. And five hundred years after Copernicus, in the scientifically enlightened year of 1958, one third of American high school students still believed the Earth to be at the center of the universe.

. . . Change one word on the label of a product, and although they cannot read it, five hundred million Chinese will refuse to buy it. How ignorant can those natives be? But—

. . . Oh yes, we once tried to put this thick catsup in a wide mouth bottle so it would pour

easily, and the company almost went broke—the American housewife refused to touch it because the shape of the container had been changed. It has taken us fifteen years to enlarge the neck of the bottle by one quarter of an inch. And—

... It takes ten years to change the lapel line of men's suits.

... Oh yes, we like to see fresh, new ideas and treatment in stories, but we can print only those exactly like those we have printed in the past.

... A popular song must be written in exactly thirty two measures. State the them in eight. Repeat it in the second eight. Bridge with another eight. Repeat the theme for the final eight. Otherwise a musician cannot play it, the people cannot learn to sing it.

... A man may take one step ahead of his culture and chance being called a genius. But if he takes two steps, he is certain to be called a menace, a madman, a fool.

... The humanist does not make even one step ahead, and thereby maintains his secure control of men's minds. No one knows, or cares, how the scientist thinks, so long as he continues to make things easier without really changing anything. So he may say, "If my theory doesn't work it must be

wrong, and I must recast my notions about the true nature of this until I find a theory which will work." If he gets any kick out of confounding himself with all this self doubt, he's welcome to it so long as he doesn't disturb the certainties of the rest of us. But the humanist says, "I cannot be wrong. If my theory doesn't work someone else is at fault and must be punished." In all man's history there has been taken not one single step forward from this attitude among the humanists.

And so I looked at these changes caused by the Starmen, and dreaded.

I SHOULD have known better. Past experience with a quarter million individuals should have taught me. I should have known that a man can receive only what his mind has been prepared to receive, that all else is ignored, or interpreted to suit his prior interpretation—that man can only accept change through it being interpreted as no change, or not knowing it is change.

Apparently I needed a reminder. Sara brought it into my office in the form of sample mail we were receiving—mail addressed to the Starmen, routed through us.

Our department's mail room had done an excellent job of classifying the letters according to

type. There were some forty six thousand letters and telegrams represented by the following:

"My corn patch is gittin purty dry. Rain on it. Yrs trule."

There were only four thousand, five hundred antonym letters in this category:

"Urgent you not let it rain on Ladies Aid picnic for worthy cause."

A few hundred said something like:

"Have twenty dollars with bookie on a longshot, Sea War, in the second. 50/50 split with you if you make him win."

Some six thousand pleaded with them to use brand products in their next personal appearances, or came within the following patterns:

"Enclosed find eleven genuine simulated gold embossed lifetime passes to any theatre showing our pictures. Usual requirement that you give your independent, unbiased opinion that picture is stupendous, colossal, gigantic applies. Lifetime passes absolutely guaranteed good for ninety days. Cancellable without notice."

"Request you furnish our department store chain with one gross real live Santa Clauses for coming Christmas sea-

son. Must have real ones. Kids are wise to phonies, pull off their beards and kick them in shins for not keeping last year promises. Causes much union grievance. For your information, enclosed is traditional editorial telling why belief in Santa Claus is necessary—and which says nothing at all about how sales would drop off, factories shut down, and newspaper (which carries the editorial) advertising space cut down without said belief. Absolutely necessary our citizens be kept believing there is a Santa Claus. As twig is bent tree will grow. Fight communism. Send us real Santa Clauses. We pay union scale."

UNFORTUNATELY, statistics on the following kind of letter were incomplete since loyal mail clerks had been tearing them up before it was realized we should keep an impartial check:

"Toiling masses greet their comrades from space. Party requires you make unmistakable statement against grasping capitalists within next twenty-four hours. No excuses, or you know what."

But there were one hundred and twenty four thousand letters of the following kind:

"Eyes of blue, five feet two,

Bette Lou, and she's pretty too. That's just a little rime the boys made up to teese me with, and I guess it does tell you what I'm like, but it didn't make me stuck up, not a bit. I don't think if a girl is inteligunt and beautiful, crushingly divistatinglly beautiful she doesn't need to be stuck up. Do You? Anyway I'm not, not a bit, stuck up I mean.

"I feel it is my sacred duty to write you and tell you what the nice girls in my town are saying about you . . ."

I LOOKED up from reading the letters. "People," I commented unhappily. "Whether it's some kind of science we don't understand, yet, or miracles we'll never understand, it doesn't change a thing. I thought it was really going to bollux up the works, but it doesn't. Before the Star-men, people looked to science for miracles. They didn't know how the scientist got them, they didn't want to know, they didn't listen when he tried to tell them. All they wanted was the miracle, not a lot of instruction which would be work to understand. Well, now they've got the miracles from another source, without any instruction on how to go and do likewise. But there's no real difference, no real change from then to now."

"I guess people will go right on being people," Sara agreed, as if that would comfort me.

APPARENTLY Shirley, and Dr. Gerald Gaffee, and Dr. Kibbie had also been busy, behind the scenes, working for my comfort.

The three of them walked into the office, at that moment, without appointment. The two men had broad, happy grins for me, and file folders of papers in their right hands. Shirley's beautiful, old homely face was wreathed in misty smiles. She carried a file folder in her right hand, and a big dry-goods box in under her left arm.

As ranking seniority in my department, she stepped forward first.

"Galaxy Admiral Kennedy," she said solemnly. "I present you with the official document making you Galaxy Admiral." She flipped the file folder open, laid it on my desk, and surely enough, there were the words, the signatures, the seal. "Those publicity seeking—uh—people down in Space Navy wanted to be in on the presentation, but I convinced them you'd want it kept in the family, first, before all the hoopla of television, newsreel, and the rest of it. I hope that was right, Galaxy Admiral, Sir."

"That was exactly right, Shirley," I managed to gasp.

Then she laid the big dry goods box on the desk top, and whisked off the lid. I saw the midnight blue of textile within the box, and a gleam of brass and braid. Much brass and braid.

"Your uniform," she said proudly. "I thought you'd want it right away."

I looked down at my white shirt, which had been fresh this morning when I put it on, but wasn't now. I looked down at my faded slacks which, eons ago, had been pressed.

"I suppose that's part of the penalty of being a Galaxy Admiral," I said, and already felt a twinge of nostalgia for the good old civilian days. "I hope it fits."

"Oh it will fit," she answered confidently. "I made N-462 give me your exact measurements."

I opened my eyes wide at that calm statement.

"You knew?" I asked.

"Sure, I knew he was a cop," she said. "But it was better to have him where I could keep an eye on him than to let him run loose. In his own way, he was doing his job. He had all your measurements down to the last quarter inch."

"I hope not all of them, Shirley," I said solemnly.

The old gal blushed, and for the first time since I'd known her, she broke into a rumbling roar of laughter. "You kill me," she chuckled.

DR. Gerald Gaffee, standing behind her, and next in line, gave a loud "Harrumph!" then stepped forward. He, too, flipped open a file folder and laid it on the desk.

"Doctor Ralph Kennedy," he said solemnly. "Here is your PhD in Extraterrestrial Psychology."

I looked at the name of the famous university, and the signatures at the bottom of the scroll. It was no purchased quickie that I need ever be ashamed of.

"How is this possible?" I asked. "It doesn't merely say 'Honorary'."

"In view of your contact with the Extraterrestrials," he murmured. "The only Terrestrial who has had private conferences with the Extraterrestrials . . ."

"I'm glad," I said simply. "There've been some things I've wanted to tell you. And now I can, now that I'm in the union."

Dr. Kibbie then stepped forward and laid his gift on the desk.

"Another two billion," he crowed happily. "A special committee, with special war emergency powers. . . ."

"Good God," I said. "I haven't finished spending the last two billion, yet."

MR. Harvey Strickland was unhappy.

He sat in his purple robe in his Washington office, and pawed

sourly at the late edition newspapers on his desk. The editors were following his instructions to the letter. There were paeans of praise, gratitude for all this foreign aid and good deeds from Youth Peace Corpsmen (which would enrich the fortunate and impoverish the unfortunate even more), the clear interpretation of the divine nature of the Star-men, the bead strings of blessings, the exhortations to his millions of readers, who bought their daily ration of ready cooked opinion from him each day, to get down on their knees and grovel in the dust.

But it was not enough.

Everybody was being too damned glad about it all.

There wasn't . . . there wasn't anybody to hate. That was the missing element. No villain anywhere.

It was all right to crusade for something, provided it is a milk-sop something safe and popular, like home and flag and mother; but nothing really starts to happen until you come out against something. And that's got to be a personalized something, somebody you can get your teeth into. You can be against sin, but there's no real fun in it until you've gone out and located yourself some sinners.

And what's the point of being for something, unless you can grab up the torch and the knife

and the bullwhip to use on somebody who isn't also for it? The way you bring about the disintegration of a community or a culture is to turn loose the self righteous with no holds barred. But how can you have the full enjoyment of self righteousness unless there's somebody to persecute?

What were the lines from that obscure writer of thirty-forty years ago? Oh yes . . .

Hide! Hide! Witch!

The good folk come to burn thee,

Their keen enjoyment hid beneath

The gothic mask of duty.

And there wasn't a goddam witch in sight. But there must be a witch in the underbrush somewhere. There had to be. There was always somebody you could make out a witch. Goddam it, everything was brought up to a peak; the fervor was running in full flood, and not a smell of anybody to pull the bloodhounds baying, to call forth the robes and light the torches.

Goddam Star-men were being too impartial with their favors for everybody. That was wrong, all wrong. It wasn't done that way. You always favored somebody at the expense of somebody else. Then to keep the bloodhounds from attacking the favored, you always found a false scent to pull them clear away

from the scene. That was the way it was done, the human way.

You give the goddam humans some witches to burn if you don't want 'em to notice what's happening.

THERE was only one human who had had more than the most casual social contact with the Starmen. And that one was damn near untouchable. He had been made a Galaxy Admiral, and Harvey Strickland hadn't been able to block it. He had been made a PhD, and even there the Strickland threats of cutting off all future donations to that university had arrived too late to stall the act. He'd been given another two billion dollars to spend, and the goddam congressmen had just laughed and said, "Well, Harvey, you ought to be able to figure out some way to get your cut of it—as usual."

His mounting fury at one Dr. Ralph Kennedy congested his veins to turn his face purple.

There ought to be a way. There had to be a way.

And what the hell had he been thinking about? Of course there was a way. He was a newspaper man, wasn't he? And wasn't the first thing a cub reporter learned on his first interview the way? You threw away what the guy actually said. You made up the things you wanted him to say, and put them in quotes. You

hung these on just enough of the truth to make them believable.

His tensions relaxed, and he began to smile. No goddam underling could be trusted with this one. He would go to see Galaxy Admiral Dr. Ralph Kennedy, in person. So let the stupe deny, scream denial. Who'd print it? Who ever does?

He snapped his fingers to bring Miller to him, to fetch his clothes, to help him dress, to accompany him to the Pentagon. In the contortions of dressing, his hand happened to brush against the left side of the loose jacket Miller was wearing today. He touched the gun through the cloth, the gun too amateurishly worn in its shoulder holster.

He froze for an instant, with his mind racing through the possibilities. He excused himself to go to the bathroom. Miller was not needed in this task. This was a demand he had been saving against the day when Miller might show a reviving spark of pride; this to be the final degradation of the once proud and haughty most popular man on the campus.

FROM a concealed space in back of the medicine cabinet he drew forth an elaborate bullet proof vest. He had no trouble, all by himself, in stripping to the waist, putting on the vest, dressing himself again. With all his

mountainous rolls of fat, an added inch of girth would never be noticed. He had no fear for his head. The amateur murderer, handling a gun for the first time, always shot at the biggest part of the target.

The things you learn in the newspaper game! You never know what might come in handy.

His high, wheezing laughter was still wreathing his face in a grin when he came out of the bathroom.

The smile froze on his face.

The fax machines were chattering like monkeys gone crazy. Miller had the TV monitor turned on and was staring at it incredulously. But there was no mistaking the news. As fast as one bulletin cleared, another came through.

"Bulletin . . . Santa Fe . . . New rivers and lakes in the desert have suddenly disappeared. . . . Jet aircraft shot aloft reports entire horizon empty of water . . . Other areas confirming entire Southwest desert dried up . . . dust storms howling . . . early sprouting seeds blackening . . . land investors ruined . . .

"Wait a minute . . . another flash coming in . . . the warm air in Canada, Alaska, turned to howling blizzard . . . many surveying parties representing land investors believed trapped . . . no word yet from Siberia . . .

no . . . here it is . . . same thing in Siberia . . . Moscow threatens reprisals against United States for harboring Starmen. . . .

"Another bulletin . . . Rio . . . the Amazon jungle has closed in again . . . no more clearings and highways . . .

One after another the bulletins poured in, the cancellations of the good deeds of Youth Peace Corpsmen—true human behavior, once the enthusiasm had worn thin, the publicity had been milked, let loose, let the whole thing disintegrate.

He wondered if the Starmen were all that human; that they could shrug it off with, "Well, we came and showed you the benefits you could have. It's not our fault if you failed to pick up and maintain what we gave you. We did our part."

A slow smile began to stretch his lips.

What the hell. It didn't matter what the Starmen were thinking or doing now. Once the shock of loosing all these goodies had worn off, the whole human race would be screaming for blood, somebody's blood, anybody's blood. The whole human race, which he so despised. . . .

And he had the power of opinion-making in his hand. . . .

He looked at Miller, standing there in front of him, meek, licked, powerless, smouldering

down underneath perhaps, but helpless. Planning violent revenge for what had been done to him, but doomed to failure. The whole human race was a Miller, his Miller.

The grin broadened into a grimace of pure glee.

THE cancellation bulletins were still pouring in over my own TV monitor, when Sara came in from her buffer office. Her eyes were wide, her face was pale, her lips were taut.

"What does it mean, Ralph?" she asked in a low voice.

I shrugged helplessly.

"I think the biologists have finished running their experiment with the culture," I said, with a wry smile. "I think they're getting ready to go home, and are tidying up the lab to leave it in the same state they found it."

"You never did believe they were for us," she said.

"Nor against us, either," I answered. "Why should they be? How long is the human race going on believing it is something so damned special that the universe and everything in it has to be arranged to suit man's convenience?"

"Maybe you're right," she said. "What I came in to tell you is that there's a Mr. Harvey Strickland and his secretary waiting in my office to see you. I don't know how they got past

all the security checks, but they're here."

"It's taken him longer to get around to me than I'd expected," I said. "Maybe he's been waiting for the right moment."

"He's picked a good one," she agreed.

She correctly interpreted my nod of assent, and stepped back to open the door. The two men must have been standing there on the other side of it. The fat man's face was already clouding with anger at the less majesty of keeping him waiting.

"Mr. Strickland, Mr. Miller," Sara murmured as they came through the door. "Galaxy Admiral Dr. Ralph Kennedy," she introduced me unnecessarily.

"Find this gentleman the widest chair we have, Sara," I said soberly and in a tone of utmost courtesy.

She had been my secretary for many years. Not one line of her face altered, but I noticed there was a new lightness to her step and less dejection in her shoulders, as she stepped over to a huge overstuffed, and murmured, "I believe the gentleman will find this comfortable." Sara was exploding with perfectly concealed laughter. The world had not come to an end, after all; not really.

She touched another chair for Miller, but he ignored her. His face was pale, his breathing

harsh, his forehead beaded with sweat, his hands at his side were trembling. His eyes were riveted on Strickland, and Strickland alone. Neither the chair, nor the room, nor the rest of us existed for him. He remained standing, a little to the side, a little behind his boss, as a good organization man must.

WHEN Strickland had wheezed and eased himself into the depths of the chair, I sat down too, and folded my hands on top of the desk. Sara was looking at me inquiringly.

"I doubt that the true record would ever find its way into the popular press or on TV channels, Sara," I said drily. "But stay and take notes, anyway."

Strickland's head jerked at that. He looked at me piercingly from out the rolls of fat around his eyes, and the slow grin appeared on his face.

"This is going to be a pleasure," he rumbled. "Another young squirt who thinks he's lord of the Earth."

"I've managed somehow to keep my head up, and my backbone straight," I said modestly. I deliberately looked at Miller, and felt my words penetrate that rapt preoccupation. His own head seemed to come up a trifle, his own back seemed to straighten. His right hand started to raise, then lowered again.

"I don't know why you've endured the nuisance of coming here," I said to Strickland. I was using moderate tones, words slowly spaced. I knew this man for what he was; I'd been around Washington long enough now and enough people had become sufficiently confident of me to talk to me. I'd met other men like him, congressmen and senators who believed their districts and their states to be their own private hunting grounds, and the people in them their political serfs and game. Most of these had no other motive except self preservation; the corrupting years had given them assurance that they were of superior clay, their behavior simply to see that none challenged that truth. Mr. Harvey Strickland was driven by compulsions running deeper than Lord of the Manor keeping his serfs under control.

"You already know what you're going to report out of this meeting," I continued. "You're looking for a patsy, and you've found one. You know, as well as I, that I have no power and no influence with the Starmen, whatever. If you've got any sense at all, and you've got plenty, you know that they've been fiddling around with the environment of this life form they've discovered; and what I might think about it makes no more difference to them than what some germ thinks

about the chemical changes some biologist makes in the culture medium on a smear slide."

His grin grew wider. It was my only answer.

"The mob is going to be howling for blood," I said. "They're always ready to blame somebody, and you'll get your kicks out of giving them somebody. It would never occur to you to use your power and your influence to build men, to build intelligence, willingness to think, willingness to shoulder responsibility for their own mistakes, to help them grow up. Because if they did that, you might not be such a hot specimen. And that's the realization you can never face."

He threw back his head and roared with laughter.

"I'll bet you were the most popular man on the campus," he said, between high, wheezing gasps.

THAT was one thing he shouldn't have said. Miller jerked like a marionette on agitated strings. His right hand swept up under his unbuttoned jacket; he pulled out the small gun; he pumped shots at the body of the huge man; one, two, three, four, five, six.

There was the thud of each, the flinching of the flesh, the slight sway to one side at the force of repeated impact—and the high, wheezing laughter.

Miller's eyes widened, his jaw dropped. Now he was trembling violently. He stared at the laughing man in horror, the full surge of his belief in Strickland's invincibility returned. His knees crumpled. He sank to the floor there in the middle of the office. He cradled his head in his arms braced by his knees, and sobbed in loud, wracking coughs.

I had half risen, bracing my hands on desk top. Sara was sitting still and frozen. I could understand, I, too, was frozen in that crouch before a leap around the desk to stop him. Strickland was calmly unbuttoning his shirt, and searching in the mesh of his bullet proof vest for the slugs of lead. As he found one, he would lift it between thumb and forefinger, hold it up as one looks at a pebble specimen, then lay it carefully on the smoking stand at the side of his chair. He was collecting a little pile of them. I had no doubt he would find them useful in the future.

I settled back down in my chair and began to breathe again. I did not punch any of the buttons under the front rim of my desktop. There was no emergency. And I doubted that the spat, spat, spat of the gun had been heard outside the office. Oddly, I heard myself still talking in measured tones, and this time to Miller huddled there on the floor.

"It wouldn't have solved anything," I was saying. "There's always been Stricklands around. There'll always be Stricklands around until people get tired of swallowing ready made opinions and slogans like cure all pills. This Strickland was only one of the series, and it wouldn't take long to replace him with another. Personally, I think the people deserve him."

Strickland looked up from his preoccupation with his little pile of misshapen bullets. He stared long at me from the creased rolls of flesh.

"I could use a man like you," he said as if making an important discovery. "By God if I couldn't!"

"But by God you won't," I said.

"You know the score," he went on, as if I hadn't spoken. As if the matter were already arranged. "Now this is the next step we'll take. . . ."

His voice trailed off, and his own eyes widened. I hadn't believed it possible to see so much of them. His own face went slack, and the flesh suddenly sagged. The whole body seemed to slump and overflow the edges of the chair. The head dropped suddenly, as far as fat would allow, toward the chest.

And only then did I become aware that a purple vortice was whirling beside my desk.

I seemed to be past shock, past caring. Perhaps I had been expecting them, prepared for their coming, ready for any kind of form in which they might appear.

"Bex, Dex, Jex, Kex and—ah—Lex," I said drily. "I think you've given the man a heart attack. Granted that one was long overdue with all that fat around it. Is this how you go about carrying out your resolution to harm no one?"

MILLER still cradled his head in his arms, his face concealed. He had not yet seen the vortice. Sara was still huddled back in her chair, staring at the purple whirlwind.

"It's all right, Sara," I said. "These are our little playmates who just like to have fun. I think this is probably how they really look. All the other he-man stuff was just showmanship. More illusion. You know, same as people?"

She nodded, but out of habit only. I wouldn't have been surprised to see her fingers transcribing it all in shorthand, without the faintest notion of what I was saying.

"Still," I said to the vortice, "it might be a little chummier if you did take human shapes." I nodded toward the slumped figure of Miller, who hadn't yet looked up.

THEY obliged me. Five, handsome, resplendent young men were standing about the room. At the stir, Miller did look up then.

"Your boss is dead," I said.

His face stiffened, and then he smiled.

He held out his hands, wrists together, toward the nearest Starman.

"They're not policemen," I said. "Sara, take him down to first aid. Let the Strickland body be until I see what these slap-happy fly-boys want now."

As if she, too, were a puppet on a string, Sara arose, reached out to Miller, helped him pull himself to his feet, helped him out the door. As they went across the room, I wasn't sure who was leaning on whom.

"Well?" I asked, when Sara had closed the door behind them. I nodded toward the Strickland body again.

I do not know, to this day, whether the Starmen felt emotions in the way we feel them. They portrayed emotions, and I suppose any life form must have emotions of some kind. Wouldn't it be a part of awareness, awareness of self, awareness of self in relation to things about us, awareness that things, even though unpersonal and impersonal, can harm or benefit us according to our use of them? These Starmen had at least the

courtesy, if nothing else, to look regretful.

"Your criticism of our mistakes is nothing compared to what Galaxy Council will say," Bex said.

"I thought you told me yours was a policy of noninterference, of bringing harm to no life form," I said.

"We have restored everything to its original state."

"Oh no," I answered. "You've been here. You've made yourself known. If nothing else, nothing else at all, we'd never be the same again."

"That's the point," he said. "You will be the same. Because the Vegans were here, thousands of years ago. Prematurely, without authorization. You've built up an entire structure of thought based on their appearance. In time, our appearance will come to be just more of the same."

"But we were progressing out of it," I said. "Our belief in demons was fading. Compared with what you can do, perhaps we hadn't made much progress in science, but we were starting off in that direction. Now you've set us back at least a thousand years."

"We miscalculated," he said, and had the grace to look unhappy about it.

"You sure did," I agreed fervently.

"It's still difficult to believe

that you've made the advances in nuclear physics, other quite commendable advances in other fields. . . ."

"Thanks," I interrupted drily.

"And still know nothing, nothing at all about yourselves. We miscalculated. We believed there must be two life forms. We didn't see how a man could master science in one area of knowledge and be as ignorant and superstitious as a savage in another. We believed that for some reason the intelligent race must be in hiding. We didn't then know that this intelligence was being hidden, not only from his own kind, but from himself.

"Otherwise we wouldn't have made an appearance at all."

"And having made the appearance . . . But if you were courting an intelligence, why the guise of—well—such hero types?"

"We felt there must be some desperate reason why the intelligence was concealed. We fitted the mores of the lesser form, lest our appearance lead to revelation unwittingly."

SO now," I said, "You've made your tests and done your exploring, and you've found that while we can mix together a little of this and that and make a big bang, emotionally and philosophically we're still ignorant savages. That we've made a little

progress in the physical sciences, but in the humanic sciences we are still determined not to make any progress, I suppose you'll—uh—ah—quarantine us? See to it that we don't get out beyond our solar system?"

"Oh no!" The reply was instant, and shocked. "We wouldn't have any right to do that. Who are we to say how a life form shall develop? When you get out there, if you do, if your humanists permit your science to develop any farther and that's unlikely, we'll cope with you somehow."

"Our humanists may fool you," I said. "You hadn't noticed, because it is such a tiny trace; but here and there we even have a humanist who is willing to admit that his authoritative personal opinion and vested importance as a leader not ever to be challenged might not, after all, be the whole and final answer."

I nodded toward Strickland's body.

"That guy's a bumbling amateur compared with some of the humanists we've had and what they've done to the human race. But don't count on us failing. That would be another miscalculation."

THE star sapphire globe, iridescent from pearl to blue, hovered once more in the center

of Washington's Mall. Once more the sad eyes of the Lincoln statue looked out upon it.

The crowd was thinner now, and quiet. The dignitaries were few. Men, such as the President, had calculated the political disadvantages of appearing too intimate with these Star-men who had given of miracles, and taken them away. No one, this time, seemed eager to challenge my position as go-between, host speeding the departing guests upon their way.

There were a few officers from the Pentagon, bless 'em, who had shown up; as if to say, right or wrong, the services will stand behind their own. The crowds of the curious had gathered, but they were neither enthusiastic nor hostile. The death of Strickland had left a hole, a deep hole not yet healed, and no one had yet turned public opinion toward the Star-men into hate. Lacking leadership in forming slogans, for this temporary space, the news media were simply reporting events. It was something new for this generation, and no one knew how to respond to it.

We stood, a little lonely group; the five Star-men somehow less resplendent this morning under a clouded sky, Sara and I, Shirley and Dr. Kibbie and Dr. Gaffee, a handful of lesser Pentagon officers.

We stood by the ramp (no rain-

bow bridge this time) and gravely shook hands with the five Star-men. They turned and filed up the ramp. There were no cheers from the crowd.

Four of them filed into the blue radiance shining from the interior, an interior our scientists had never got to explore. The fifth, I suppose it was Bex, turned and faced the silent people. So he was going to carry out my suggestion of saving face, after all!

"People of Earth," he said, and his voice came clearly to all of us. "I reckon you all are disappointed that we hafta go home now. But like your own Peace Corps we came, and we showed you how to turn wasteland into bountiful fertile acres. We done our duty by you, and I reckon now that you know what ought to be done, you'll go right ahead and do it. We showed you. We done our part."

He waited.

There was no answering cheer.

"Goodbye now. When you all have figgered out how to sail across space to our shores, you'll find yourselves just as welcome as the people who come to your shores."

There was a murmur from one of the officers behind me.

"Why the dirty, hostile sonsof-bitches!" he said.

Bex turned then, and walked into the blue radiance. The ramp

slid, melted into the side of the ship. The door closed. The globe lifted; slowly at first, then faster and faster.

It melted into the layer of clouds. It was gone.

The silent crowd shuffled a little, and slowly began to disperse.

THEY had come from the stars, and Earth would start its long road to recovery.

I looked at Sara, Shirley, Gaffee, Kibbee.

"Well, boys and girls," I said. "We're still the Bureau of Extra-terrestrial Psychology. Maybe some of the obscure research departments of some of the universities will still want some information from us."

"We may have to hoard that two billion and stretch it out for quite a while," Dr. Kibbee answered.

The three of them turned then, and started walking toward our staff cars, ahead of Sara and me.

"I wonder if Old Stone Face might hire back a couple of wandering personnel people," I mused.

Sara grabbed me by the arm and halted me. She spoke intently.

"Look, boss," she said firmly. "Everybody's shocked now. After that they're going to be mad. They'll be as mad as hornets for a while. And then they're going to start thinking. Now that we

know that outside our solar system, now that we know it is there; how long do you think it's going to be before we grit our teeth, dig in, and determine to go out there, ourselves? Come hell or high water!"

Shirley, Gaffee, Kibbee had stopped when we did, and now they drifted back.

"Why sure," Kibbee began to bubble again. "And that two billion will be just a drop in the bucket compared to the money we can promote for that kind of program."

"Doctor Kennedy, I'm going to need much more scientific help than I've got if I'm to carry my share," Gaffee said, and began to look far away into a dream.

"And, Admiral," Shirley said, "I think we ought to use this lull to get reorganized for the big push."

"Okay, kids," I said. "You're right. We're not licked. We're just starting."

The Space Cadet chauffeurs saw us turn and start walking briskly toward them. Even at that distance they began to catch the sudden enthusiasm our strides and faces revealed. They straightened up, pulled their space helmets into ready, climbed jauntily into the cockpits of the automobiles, and when we had slammed the ports behind us, they blasted off down Pennsylvania Avenue.

THE END

MISSIONARIES from the SKY

By STANTON A. COBLENTZ

Introduction by Sam Moskowitz

CERTAINLY one of the greatest if not the very greatest science fiction novel ever written was Gulliver's Travel by Jonathan Swift. The medium of science fiction lent itself so remarkably to satire that one would expect a large body of work in that category. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Only two important satirists were ever developed in the science fiction magazines, Stanton A. Coblentz and L. Sprague de Camp.

Stanton A. Coblentz made his initial appearance in AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY for Summer, 1928 with *The Sunken World*, a novel of Atlantis. The story was an instant success, because Coblentz never became so involved with his message that he forgot he was writing science fiction. The science was not only sound it

was prophetic, including descriptions of atomic submarines and atom-powered surface ships.

The appearance of *After 12,000 Years*, a second novel in AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY for Spring, 1929, lifted Coblentz among the top science fiction writers of his day. A scathing satire at the senselessness of war, *After 12,000 Years*, also delved into the practicality of vitamins in capsules and automobiles with engines in the rear.

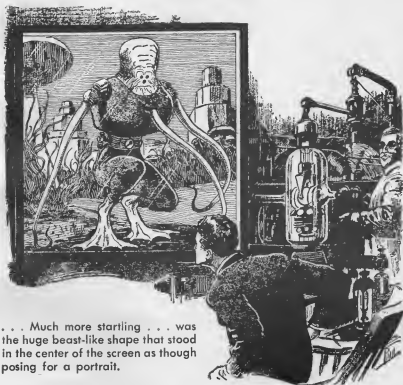
Coblentz became one of the mainstay novelists of AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY which always featured a novel of 50,000 to 80,000 words in each edition. His *Blue Barbarians* in Summer, 1931, a devastating mockery of the worship of money, transferred to the planet Venus and *The Man From Tomorrow*,

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Spring-Summer, 1933, a withering attack on the morality of modern civilization by a man from the future, were among his finest efforts.

Missionaries from the Sky represents one of the few short stories written by Coblenz which successfully captured the flavor of his novels. This one is particularly unique inasmuch as it is a spoof at the satirist, at Coblenz himself! In his various

novels Coblenz had presented at great length and with far-from-subtle pen the vices and evils of the world. In Missionaries from the Sky, a scientist stumbles into communication with an advanced race on Mars who are capable of correcting all the ills that Mr. Coblenz deplores, all they need to come to earth and do the job is some basic information from him. What he decides in the showdown is



. . . Much more startling . . . was the huge beast-like shape that stood in the center of the screen as though posing for a portrait.

what makes this a particularly delightful work.

Stanton A. Coblentz began professional writing as a reporter for the SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER in 1919. He moved to New York in 1920 and earned his living writing book reviews, poems and articles for THE NEW YORK TIMES and THE NEW YORK SUN, supplemented by general freelancing. In science fiction he has seen The Wonder Stick, When the Birds Fly South, The Sunken World, After 12,000 Years, The Blue Barbarians, The Planet of Youth, Under the Triple Suns, The Runaway World, and Next Door to the Sun in hard covers.

These represent only part of the more than 30 books Coblentz has had published including Marching Men, The Decline of Man, Villains and Vigilantes and The Literary Revolution.

Coblentz's chief interest in recent years has been poetry. He is editor and publisher of the country's leading magazine of verse, WINGS and has had many volumes of his own published. In this regard, fantasy readers will be particularly interested in a collection of weird, fantastic and science fiction poetry compiled by Mr. Coblentz in 1949 titled Unseen Wings and published by Beechurst Press, New York.

PERHAPS once every fifty or a hundred years, it is given to some brilliant or favored individual to perform some act that will alter the destiny of mankind. Sometimes a statesman, sometimes a general, sometimes a dextrous worker in words, will have the sudden opportunity to shape the future; sometimes it is a scientist that assumes control, and in such a case the change is likely to be startling indeed.

Not more than half a dozen scientists in all history have found themselves in such a world-shaking role. One thinks of James Watt; one thinks of Edison; but, at the same time, there are some of whom one emphatically does

not think. Among these, I may mention Dr. Ira Rand, possibly the least known of scientific geniuses, yet in some respects the most remarkable of them all.

There are not many persons who know of the discovery made by Rand, and of his phenomenal opportunity. There are not many who are aware of the extraordinary decision which it fell to him to make, and of the rare courage with which he submerged his fame and fortunes. . . .

Had Rand chosen otherwise, his name would rank beside those of Einstein, Marconi and Curie, among the great scientific discoverers of all time. And the earth today would be a vastly dif-

ferent place—but possibly less pleasant to inhabit.

Now that Rank has made the unalterable step, it is only fair that the world should learn of his accomplishment—and that it should recognize the self-abnegation of the man. He himself is likely to remain mute; hence I, who served as his right-hand assistant, have taken it upon myself to make his story public.

There are, of course, many who know that Dr. Rand—as manager of the laboratories of one of our great radio manufacturers—has given much time to experimentation in methods of wireless transmission. His Prismatic Bifocal Television Lens, His Magnetic Tonal Purifier, His Heterodynamic Radio Amplifier, are only a few of the devices by which he has commended himself to attention. Yet, original as these contrivances are, few persons look upon him as more than a clever technician, or suspect the vastly greater achievements of which he is capable.

It was during a period of confusion in the world of radio that the great opportunity came to Dr. Rand. There are none of us who do not recall how, only two or three years ago, owners of radio sets began to complain of unaccountable disturbances, which in some cases became so severe as to preclude normal reception. Not all wave lengths

were affected; but there was a certain area, between 220 and 235 meters, which was continuously subject to attack. The noises, which rarely ceased for more than a few minutes at a time, did not resemble static, nor any form of electrical interference; it was as if a heavy, husky voice were calling from the invisible—a voice that spoke no known language!

So loud as to drown out all except the most powerful stations, the tones throbbed and wavered and vibrated with such living accents, that one would have sworn that some actual being was speaking. Yet there was nothing to support the theory that some unlicensed station was interfering. Not only could no trace of any such station be found, but hearers were unanimous in testifying that the sounds represented no known tongue. Moreover—and this was the most astonishing fact—the disturbances were equally prominent in all parts of the earth. Radio owners in South Africa and Siam joined their brothers in America, Europe and Australia in the chorus of complaints; it seemed as if the very atmosphere of our planet had been affected and as if some new and previously unknown influence were convulsing the ether. But scientists, even while hesitantly advancing this hypothesis, could not reconcile it with the

fact that the wave-lengths beneath 220 meters and above 235 remained untroubled.

SIMULTANEOUS with this manifestation, a strange although minor annoyance had been observed on television screens. Every now and then, inexplicable shadows would flash across the receiving apparatus; dancing points of light would be seen; wavering forms would appear and vanish, or cloudy apparitions present themselves before the eye. Always these images would be small—in many cases no larger than a silver dime; always they would be blurred and flickering, and would speedily disappear; sometimes would seem to form fantastic patterns; but in no case did they show more stability than leaping foam, and in no case could their origin be determined.

There was one fact, in particular, that caused much interested speculation. Like the mysterious sounds on the radio, the images were world-wide in their occurrence; they were as prominent in Peking as in New York, as noticeable in Rio de Janeiro as in Melbourne and London. What hitherto undetected influence was agitating the atmosphere of the earth?

Many were the theories that were advanced and rejected; but, for a long time, no observer

traced a connection between the unknown television lights and shadows and the enigmatic radio disturbances. It remained for Dr. Rand to identify the two as manifestations of the same phenomenon—and thus to open the way for his master achievement.

In the beginning, Dr. Rand himself did not observe the connection. He was interested chiefly in the aberrations of the television screen—and from the first, he harbored a theory which bears testimony to the intuitive powers of genius. The nature of that theory long remained a mystery even to me, who spent my days in close contact with Rand; but I was not slow in noting the eagerness that had come into his eyes, the excited haste with which his lean, nervous figure went bustling about the laboratory, the enthusiastic ring in his voice and the absentmindedness that was overcoming him—most of all, the air of world-excluding preoccupation, with which he would bury himself for hours on end amid a mass of wires, lenses, batteries, electro-magnets, and foul-smelling chemicals.

That he was working at some new invention was evident—but how guess the purpose of that invention when he persistently refused to answer my questions, or else testily advised me to "mind my own business"? At times, to be sure, I did secure

peeps at the apparatus which he was slowly putting together; but the complicated array of wires, mirrors and vacuum tubes told me nothing beyond what I already suspected. With a sigh, I was forced to dismiss the matter, and to decide that Dr. Rand would let me into the secret only when his whim should dictate.

IT was long before his whim did dictate. Days went by, weeks went by, and in my absorption in other matters I had almost come to forget Dr. Rand's experiment. When now and then the thought of it recurred to me, I would dismiss my doubts with a shrug, concluding that probably the invention had failed. And since I had been called temporarily to another part of the laboratory, where I could not watch Dr. Rand at work, I had no longer any visible reminder of what he was attempting. Hence the eventual announcement found me unprepared.

I still had no inkling of the truth when, greeting me one morning with a dancing light in his eyes, he jovially invited me to his private laboratory. "I have something to show you, Denison," he said, in suppressed tones beneath which I seemed to read a veiled eagerness. "Something I want your opinion about."

As we started away together, he stroked his bristly brown

beard thoughtfully, and in his eyes the dancing light gave place to one of shrewd anticipation.

Yet I observed nothing to justify that anticipation when we had reached our destination. Before us, attached to a television receiver, stood a weird-looking device reminding me of an enlarged X-ray machine. I could see that, within a long central tube, there was a series of queerly arranged crystals and lenses; I could see various prisms and mirrors, and I could observe that wires, attached to a wall socket, were running through the whole. But all this gave me little hint as to the nature of the contrivance.

"You behold here a Micro-Crystalline Televisor," explained Rand, surveying his invention proudly. "The first of its kind ever created."

"Micro-Crystalline what?" I gasped.

"Micro-Crystalline Televisor. It is designed to enlarge and clarify images beyond the range of the ordinary television receiver."

"You mean—it is a receiver of exceptional power?"

"It is that—and more than that. You see that there are two screens." Here he pointed to two wide strips of white cloth, placed at opposite sides of the room. "The first receives an image in the manner of an ordinary television apparatus. The second takes

the image reflected from the first, after it has been magnified and refined by lenses, much as the leg of a flea or the wing of a gnat will be magnified by a microscope."

"What is the principle behind it?"

Rand smiled, and stroked his beard as if in self-congratulation. "Nothing except a fresh application of laws already well known. Simply the laws of the enlargement and clarification of images by means of lenses, and their transmission to a screen. You see it in operation daily in the motion picture machine. To be sure, in that case the enlargement is made from a film; but I have secured the practical equivalent of a film by means of careful refraction from mirrors and well placed crystals. An image, obtained from the first screen, is transmitted to the second, purged of imperfections and magnified between ninety and a hundred and fifty diameters. Do you wish a demonstration?"

I nodded.

"The peculiar dancing lights and shadows on the television screen were what gave me the idea," continued Rand, as he carefully focused the machine and pressed an invisible button. "It was an inspiration—I am elated to see my theory confirmed."

No sooner had he spoken than he snapped off the electric lights

and the room was plunged into darkness. There came a queer whirring sound which told me that the machine was in operation; there came a sizzling series of blue sparks—but that was all. The screen remained blank; and, as I watched in bewilderment, it seemed to me that Rand's experiment had failed.

"You must give it time," boomed the husky voice of the inventor, as though he had read my thoughts. "I am not trying for any ordinary television reception. I want to show you the mysterious lights and shadows. If you will wait a moment, they are certain to appear."

Fortunately, my patience was placed under no strain. Even as the words left Rand's lips, a minute, slowly moving image leapt up on one of the screens, blurred and irregular in outline, and of a mottled gray hue. Being of a kind which I had frequently seen, it caused me no surprise; but what did surprise me—indeed, what startled me so that I gaped like a man gone mad—was the reflection that instantly appeared on the second and larger screen.

Even to this day, when all that happened then is an old and often repeated story, I find it impossible to describe my consternation, my blank and uncomprehending amazement. Certainly, this was the weirdest sight I had ever seen! Or was it the weirdest?—

Not less unearthly spectacles were to follow, but none that left me so dazzled, so stupefied, so altogether nonplussed.

Across the ten-foot reaches of the screen, there flickered what I might have taken for a motion picture projected by some fabulous and superhuman operator. It seemed to me that I was gazing upon a forest, rank with a wild and monstrous vegetation; it seemed that snake-like slimy tendrils were threshing and swaying along the ground like gigantic arms seen in delirium; it seemed that, roofing in these animate and convulsive masses of creepers, were huge mushroom-like plants, whose columns were thick as a man's body, and whose gracefully curving domes stood edge to edge, as though placed in harmony by some master artist.

BUT these were not what held my attention. Much more startling, much more incredible, was the huge beast-like shape that burst through the thicket, and stood in the center of the screen as though posing for its portrait. Was it really beast? Or was it man? Surely, it seemed as much like the one as like the other! Of gigantic stature—it must have been more than eight feet in height—it came bounding to view in the manner of a kangaroo, leaping with ease and agility upon its enormously devel-

oped hind legs. Its fore limbs—three in number—ended in crab-like tentacles which gave it a most repulsive appearance; its coat was of some dark hairless substance reminding me of a close-fitting uniform; its chest was extremely broad and capacious, its abdominal parts narrow and contracted; while what struck me most of all was its huge and unusual head.

This alone it was that gave the creature its human appearance. Preternaturally large in proportion to the size of the body, it was a sagacious oblong in shape, and seemed more than half forehead. The eyes were mere glittering points beneath the hairless brow; the face was flat, and a small round opening showed where the nose should have been; the mouth was almost invisible, and there was not even the suggestion of a chin. Yet, despite its atrociously ugly appearance, the face was ruffled with deep lines and furrows that gave the unmistakable impression of intelligence.

For a moment I stared at this outlandish thing with the feeling of one who has seen a ghost. Though never subject to hallucinations, I was willing to believe that this was some delirious vision that would swiftly vanish. But the seconds went by, and it did not fade. The fantastic man—or fantastic beast—continued to gaze at me from the screen as

if to inquire, "Well, friend, what do you think of me?" And I continued to return his glance with a sort of stupid speechlessness.

It was the murmured words of Rand that restored my senses. "What do you say, Denison? What do you say now? How do you like my televisor? Is it a success, do you think?"

"Success?" I blurted out, still unable to collect my thoughts. "I—I don't quite understand. What—what can it mean? Have we both gone mad, Dr. Rand?"

Heartily the laughter of the inventor rang through the room. "Mad?" he echoed, as if relishing some secret joke. "Mad? No, I don't believe so—though you're likely to see enough to unbalance any man. You think this image extraordinary, do you?"

Again he laughed, though still for some reason that I could not understand.

"Extraordinary is not the word! It is unbelievable!"

"Nothing is unbelievable," he dogmatized, "when you are looking at another planet."

"Another planet?"

"You certainly don't recognize anything on this planet, do you?" he went on, suavely. "You are viewing a typical scene on Mars."

Breathlessly I gaped at him. My heart seemed to stop short; the word Mars came to my lips, trembled there, and died unuttered.

Not waiting for me to recover from my amazement, Rand fluently continued, "The images on the screen only bear out what I suspected long ago. The disturbances in television could not be explained by any earthly influence; therefore I concluded that their source was extraterrestrial. It was in the hope of messages from outer space that I experimented with my televisor. For a long time, evidently, Mars has been trying to communicate with us. I have been the first to catch the messages."

"How do you know it is Mars?" I demanded.

RAND smiled as one might smile at a child who has asked some preposterous question. "Because the surface conditions, as I observe them, correspond with those on Mars and on no other known planet. You notice, for example, how large the men are, and how easily they move about. That is because, the planet being smaller, there is less gravitational pull to restrain them—"

"You might also say that of Mercury—and of the moon," I objected.

"So you might—but there is other evidence. Suppose, however, we do not argue. After you have had a few more peeps, we may be better able to talk."

A few moments passed in silence. The image of the huge,

big-headed creature fled from the screen; and in its place other images appeared. So startled was I that many of them quite eluded me, and I cannot begin to enumerate them all. I do recall, however, that I had glimpses of sandy plains covered with a scraggly, fungus-like vegetation; of wide, straight waterways bordered with gelatinous weeds; of cloudless heavens in which shone a sun smaller than ours in appearance, and two minute moons; of fields of spiny grasses in which six-legged mice-sized creatures leapt with the agility of grasshoppers; of strange octagonal towers, open at the top, through which sprang queer man-like beings such as I had already seen; and of little flying cars, scarcely bigger than wheelbarrows, by means of which these beings projected themselves high in air, now floating gracefully with the motion of a breeze-blown leaf, now restlessly circling and spiralling like a gyrating fly, now shooting straight upward and descending with a rocket-like precision and speed.

I had no longer any doubts. "Dr. Rand," said I, taking both his hands warmly, while my eyes, I fear, grew dim with emotion, "Let me congratulate you! You have made a miraculous discovery! You have accomplished a scientific—"

Dr. Rand smiled gravely.

"Thank you, Denison," he interrupted. "But let us not be premature. Wait till you have seen all. I am working at a still more remarkable discovery. When that is completed—then, if you wish, you may be enthusiastic."

Press him as I might, he would not explain what he had in mind. He merely nodded cryptically, and bade me be patient; then abruptly turned aside, and signified that the interview was at an end. But the time was not far off when I was to learn that he had been making no idle boast.

ONLY a few weeks later, he again called me excitedly into the laboratory. Once more I found myself face to face with the "televisor"; once more I saw the blue sparks flashing, and viewed fantastic images on the screen. But, on this occasion, there were some new instruments present—a microphone and a powerful radio receiver, of the type designed for long-distance reception. "Now I want you not only to watch carefully, but to listen," prompted Rand, his gray eyes a-glitter with an eager light. "See if you do not notice something unusual."

So speaking, he switched off the current, and the images on the screen vanished. Then carefully he adjusted the radio dial and set the machine into opera-

tion; and, at the same time, he renewed his activities with the "televisor." I was interested to hear once more those strange noises that had puzzled listeners for months; I was interested to note that the "televisor," operating intermittently, exhibited pictures of bare snow-plains, of hills covered with weird castle-like houses, and of strange octopus-like animals that sidled across the land like living nightmares. But at first I did not observe the vital fact.

"Well, you see?" inquired Rand, expectantly, after I had followed the exhibition for a moment.

"I see many queer sights—" I started to confess. But the wry expression on his face cut me short; I knew that I had been guilty of a stupid reply.

Hence I continued to watch and listen—soon a striking discovery flashed upon me. The peculiar noises on the radio occurred simultaneously with the images on the screen! When the one ceased, the other was resumed! Not once, but a dozen times, this occurred; the appearance and cessation of the two synchronized absolutely! Mere chance could not be the explanation; no series of coincidences could work out so perfectly; the relationship between the radio and the television pictures was demonstrated beyond question!

But what did that relationship imply? So I inquired of Rand, as I turned to him with bewildered exclamations. "Did the radio noises also issue from Mars?"

"Yes, the noises do issue from Mars," he declared, in matter-of-fact tones, but with a twinkle of undisguised enthusiasm. "They too represent part of the attempt to communicate with us. Both by sight and by sound, the Martians wish to impress us."

"But how—how did you find it out?" I demanded.

"Merely by accident. One day I happened to have the televisor and the radio in operation at once—and I would have had to be blind and deaf not to notice the connection. What astonished me is that no one has discovered it before."

"Perhaps others have discovered it," I suggested. "After all, what good would it do them?"

"What good would it do?" He flung back my words with an angry vehemence; for a second he stood regarding me in surprise and indignation. "What good would it do, my dear man? Do you mean to tell me you don't see? Why, it is the Rosetta Stone of science! It is the key to the most baffling of enigmas! It holds the secret of world-to-world communication!"

Blankly I stood regarding the inventor. "To enter into world-to-world communication, Dr.

Rand," I protested, mildly, "one must not only receive messages, but send them—"

"And who says I can't send them?" he flung back, not waiting for me to finish. "For heaven's sake, Denison, what do you think I've been working at all these weeks? After all, the problem is not so difficult. Knowing that the Martians have a powerful transmitting apparatus, it is reasonable to conclude that they have equally powerful receivers. Given sufficient electrical energy, it has long been possible to send messages anywhere on earth; given sufficient increase of power, there is no barrier to flashing our words through the ether even across a distance of many light-years, since the ether, being a conductor of heat and light, would also convey the Hertizian waves—"

"You mean you have succeeded in connecting with Mars?"

"Exactly. Remember this: at its closest approach to the earth, that planet is but thirty-five or forty million miles away, and even at its farthest is separated from us by little more than two hundred million miles—a mere stone's throw, as astronomical distances go. Now, considering the sensitiveness of the Martian instruments, a power of one thousand kilowatts, which I have applied to the radio and television transmitters—"

"Is it sufficient to enable you to say 'How-do-you-do?' to the Martians?" I finished for him.

"More than sufficient. I have already exchanged a few elementary ideas with them—and have found the results quite edifying."

"Doubtless," I commented, not quite certain whether Rand were serious or were but trying to test my credulity. "Of course, you understand the Martian language by intuition—"

"No, but I am taking a course of instruction."

This statement Rand made in the simple and unpretentious manner of one who announces that he is studying French or Spanish.

"By this time, I am an advanced student," he continued, while I smiled skeptically. "When the Martians intercepted the first television images I sent them, and so found that I had caught their messages, they were eager to give me lessons. It is not really difficult. Want to see how it is done?"

"Seeing is believing," said I.

Immediately Rand turned to the microphone, and bellowed out a long and unintelligible drive! While I was wondering if excessive experimentation were not driving him mad, he took out his watch, carefully noted the time, and remarked, "It will be a little more than eleven minutes before we can get our reply, for Mars at

present is more than sixty million miles away, and the ether waves, making the round trip at the rate of one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles a second—"

"Yes, I understand," I interposed. "No doubt I can wait the eleven minutes."

None the less, I had never thought that time could pass so slowly. Conversation lagged; Rand and I alike did nothing but consult our watches; and the watches as if ruled by some tantalizing demon persisted in crawling at a worm-like pace. What was I to see when the time had expired? Frankly, I expected nothing at all, yet, as the minutes dragged past, I could not check an eagerness which was gradually taking possession of me.

AT last the specified period had elapsed. "Time!" announced Rand, snapping the watch back into his pocket. And, as promptly as though regulated by clock-work, the demonstration commenced.

It was really nothing very spectacular, yet it was as extraordinary a thing as could be imagined. On the screen before me there appeared one of the big-headed, five-limbed creatures that I knew to be a Martian man; and behind him was the same moving, snake-like foliage that I

had already seen. Simultaneously, slow and distinct sounds, like human speech, began to issue from the radio; and I saw that those sounds harmonized with the motions of the man, and that he was acting as would an instructor addressing a class. First he would bend down and tap his knee, while over the radio the word "Molab!" would come to us clearly; then he would touch his thigh, and we would hear, "Darg! Darg!" then he would indicate his breast, and "Habot! Habot!" would burst upon our ears; then he would refer to various other parts of his anatomy and to the features of his surroundings, proceeding always with a care and deliberation that made his intentions obvious.

"Better take down the words, Denison," advised Dr. Rand. "This is all for your especial benefit. I notified him that a newcomer would be here. Personally, of course, I am already far beyond this stage. I have a vocabulary of more than two thousand Martian words—which, moreover, I can combine into sentences. Besides, I am teaching the Martians English."

While this announcement left me stricken speechless, and while the demonstration on the screen still continued, Rand delved into a drawer, and drew forth a notebook lettered with crazy-looking hieroglyphics. "I have the Mar-

tian words noted down here," he informed me. "Also, I have a record of everything the Martians have said to me, and of all that I have said to them. Already I have gathered information enough to take the world by storm."

"God in heaven! Why not do so?" I exclaimed.

"I shall. I surely shall—in time. But I do not want to be premature. When I have my story complete, the effect will be much more shattering. Meanwhile, would you like me to read you some of the results?"

To this question, of course, there could be but one answer. After Rand had switched off the "televisor" and the radio, I sat down to listen to his reports.

"The Martians appear to be a curious people," he assured me, by way of preliminary. "They do not seem to look at things as we do. Of course, there are gaps in my knowledge of their speech, which I have had to fill in by guesswork. But here is what they seem to think of us."

And slowly he read, "Our earthly brothers, inhabitants of a younger and weaker world, it is with great joy that we greet you across space. For thousands of years we have known that your planet was populated, but we have long debated whether it was populated by intelligent beings. The accepted opinion was

in the negative; none the less, from time to time throughout the ages we have attempted to send you messages. But they were never acknowledged until now, leading us to conclude that you knew nothing even of so primitive a device as wireless. To the argument that this proved you mere crawling beasts there was apparently no answer. Of course, it was argued that you were but an infant race, having at most a few hundred thousand or a few million years of wisdom, when yours were fishes squirming in the salt waves. Even so, we were disappointed at your lack of progress. But now that we have learned that you are on the threshold of civilization, we are delighted to exchange ideas with you, and to offer that aid to be expected of elder brothers."

Rand paused, and looked at me with a quizzical smile. "Rather interesting, don't you think?" he inquired.

"Rather presumptuous, I should say. The Martians seem to look down on us from an almighty distance. But how did you succeed in getting so complete a message?"

The inventor regarded me thoughtfully, and slowly replied, "Interspersed with the Martian, there were some English words, which our friends up there were remarkably quick about picking up. For the rest, facial expres-

sions, gestures, charts and pictures aided me to understand. Of course, it has taken months of preparation. . . . Do you want to hear more?"

I grunted in the affirmative.

Rand turned the pages of the note-book with a doubtful expression. "Now here is something curious," he stated at length. "A while back, I sent them a television image of myself, but did not mention who or what it was. Their response is refreshing. Just observe what they think of me."

"Our earthly brothers, we were amazed at the picture of the strange two-legged animal. How unspeakably ugly! Is it a domestic beast? It looks harmless but stupid! What is the peculiar pointed swelling in the middle of the face just below the eyes? And what is the mat of hair at the bottom of the face? Even our domestic animals have had no hair for thirty million years. A committee of scientists, called in to observe the exhibit, believe that it represents some primeval form which should have been wiped out ages ago—"

Rand ended in mid-sentence; my laughter cut him short. "Perhaps the remarks are justified! he declared, joining me in hearty merriment. "Well, these are the least ludicrous reports I could read you. You had better wait a while before hearing any more.

I am about to send the Martians an account of our ways of living, accompanied, when possible, by television pictures."

My curiosity being whetted, I attempted to coax further information from Rand. I urged him to read me more of the Martian communications; I pleaded with him to give the results of his inquiries immediately to the world; I entreated him to take me deeper into his confidence, so that we might conduct immediate inquiries in partnership. But to all my appeals he turned a deaf ear. Never had I met a man more doggedly bent on following his own way! Not only did he pledge me to secrecy, but he was determined to reveal nothing more to me for the present, and to keep his results from the world until his findings were complete. And I, while feeling unbounded admiration for the genius of the man, was disturbed in unaccountable ways by his secretive-ness, as though I had some indefinable intimation of evil to come. . . .

FROM time to time, during the weeks that followed, I attempted to wrest from Rand some word as to the progress of his experiments. But though I encountered him daily, there was little information I could obtain. He would answer my inquiries by asserting that everything was

"going splendidly" or that he had just "received a new message," but he would not enter into details; and all the while he was obviously preoccupied, and was changing in ways that alarmed his other associates no less than myself. Habitually he was coming to wear a far-away, abstracted expression, as of one who dwells in some other universe; he was growing absent-minded, and would be as likely as not to forget whether or not he had adjusted his cravat or eaten his breakfast; he would pass us sometimes without a nod, not because he wished to be rude, but because he actually failed to see us; he was becoming emaciated and thin, and his eyes were aglow with a frenzied, almost fanatical fire, while now and then he was heard muttering to himself, as if in a secret ecstasy or dread.

It was three months before he again called me into his laboratory, and signified that he had a revelation to make. His face on this occasion looked strained and worn, as in the case of one who has endured some intolerable worry; his cheeks were almost cadaverous in their pallor, but in his eyes there was the brilliant flame that had been there so often of late. "Well, Denison," he exclaimed, as he sank wearily into a chair beside the "televisor," "I don't know how much

longer I can keep going. My researchers have been eating away at me like a disease. It is time that I take someone into my confidence. The burden is too much for me to bear alone."

"What burden?" I demanded.

He looked at me wistfully, and shook his head slowly, as if but half decided on his course. "I do not know, Denison," he ruminated, "if it is fair to make you share the responsibility. The weight of the whole world rests upon my head. I have it in my power, if I will, to change the course of history."

Wonderingly I stared at him. Was not the explanation that the man had gone mad?

"Queer things have happened since I spoke to you before," he stated. "I have received startling messages. A momentous decision lies in my hands. A final message, which I expect this afternoon, may determine my choice."

"You speak in enigmas," said I.

"Events make me speak in enigmas. But the greatest enigma is that which lies unsolved before me. Oh, God, that I may have the wisdom to decide rightly!"

Abruptly he arose, and, clenching his fists, went pacing about the room in the manner of one distracted.

But after a moment, he re-

sumed his seat. Becoming more settled he confided, "The messages I have received of late, Denison, place me in a fearful dilemma. You must not mind my actions; they are merely my efforts to retain a grip on my sanity. Sometimes I wonder whether I have not been dreaming. . . . Let me read you some recent messages."

HE fumbled for his note-book, which displayed scores upon scores of pages packed with hieroglyphics. Momentarily he hesitated; then mumbled, "Here is something typical," and began to read:

"Our earthly brothers, we cannot decide whether what you tell us is serious or in jest. But it must be in jest. You say that your world is divided into many nations—have you not learned to uproot narrowness? You say that, within those nations, some persons have wealth to squander while others starve—can it be that justice is unknown in your land? Worst of all, you declare that the nations permit wars in which hundreds of thousands or even millions of citizens are slaughtered—is it then that your planet is a madhouse? No, our earthly brothers, we will not believe so. You must be jesting. On our world, no nations have existed since our emergence from barbarism tens of millions of

years ago. In all that time no Martian, except an occasional victim of mental disease, has lifted his arm against another Martian. It must be so with you too, our earthly brothers, for are you not also civilized?"

Rand paused, and looked up with a grim smile. "This is only one message out of many," he declared.

"Well, what of it?" said I. "The Martian views may be a little peculiar, but that is no reason to go to pieces and let your hair turn gray."

"Not in the least. But you do not understand," he continued, while his thin fingers nervously toyed with his untrimmed beard. "We have created a consternation on Mars. When the people there found that I was not jesting, but that we really do have nations and warfare they expressed their pity and dismay. They concluded that we were savages in need of intelligent guidance, and started a movement to remake the earth. They have the spirit of the true reformer, I believe, for they want to model our world on the plan of theirs."

"Well why not let them try?" I suggested with the attempt at a laugh. "At their distance, they are not likely to prove dangerous!"

"Yes, but they can overcome the distance!"

SUDDENLY Rand's manner became alert, decisive, fiery; and it was with a startling energy that he proceeded. "They can overcome the distance! They are a million years in advance of us scientifically! They can cross the void to earth! They have actually flown through space to certain of the asteroids, millions of miles away! If we will let them, they will come to the earth! It is all for me to decide, for me to decide!"

Filled with the vehemence of this announcement, Rand again shot to his feet. His whole frame was quivering; his movements were abrupt and violent as he once more began to pace the floor.

"Calm yourself, Dr. Rand," I urged, springing to his side and taking his arm. "Calm yourself. Tell me, just what is for you to decide?"

"For me to decide whether the Martians will come here!" he burst forth, flinging himself free of my arm. "For me to decide whether they will come as missionaries! Whether they will give us their ways of thought, of living, their civilization. The Martians want to convert the earth! It is all, all for me to decide!"

Disregarding my entreaties, he continued to storm back and forth like a man out of his wits.

At first, of course, I did not take him seriously. In spite of

the earnest, glittering fire in his eyes, the obvious explanation was that the poor man had taken leave of his senses. Hence I did my best to humor him, to console him, and to pretend to give credence to his erratic notions.

"The fact is," he went on to explain, when finally he had been somewhat sobered, "that the Martians would completely transform life here. Being in command of unlimited mechanical power, they would control us as we control the cattle of the fields. They would take up the reins of government in all lands; they would make the laws; they would batter down social distinctions; they would re-distribute wealth, level away inequalities, prohibit warfare, and abolish national differences."

"In other words," said I, still not taking Rand seriously, "they would convert our world into a Utopia!"

"Yes, but into a Utopia without freedom. We would no longer fight, cheat, bicker, and destroy—but we could no longer go our own way! We would have to act as the Martians saw fit! Would we be better off? Would we be better off? I keep asking myself. Would the gain equal the loss?"

"My dear Dr. Rand," I protested, observing how the inventor, frenziedly raking his hair, was still pacing the floor, "I feel sure that you exaggerate. How

can the Martians do all these things? Certainly, you are making a mountain out of an ant-hill!"

Rand turned to me with contempt staring plainly from his eyes. "It is evident that you do not understand," he exclaimed. "Well, then, perhaps you will see for yourself! The time has come for more television messages! Your own eyes will inform you!"

Hastily he turned to the "televisor," and after a moment the sputtering blue sparks began to appear, and images flashed once more upon the screen. Multitudes of the huge, five-limbed Martians darted before us, their noseless faces hideous as goblins. Some were clothing themselves in queer balloon-like suits ten times their own size; others were wielding long syringe-like tubes from which foggy vapors issued in spurts; still others were flying through the air in their odd little cars, or else springing along the ground in frog-like leaps. Truly, they made an impressive, a frightening assemblage; they struck me as things horrible, inimical; I was alarmed, though I knew that they were sixty million miles away; I shuddered as at the vision of a ravaging army.

"See them getting ready to invade the earth!" exclaimed Rand, in wild eagerness. "Those balloon-like devices are vacuum gar-

ments with which they may counteract the Martian gravitation and reach the earth. Look how they are all ready to set out! Notice those syringe-like machines! They will discharge gases to paralyze our will-power and make us unable to resist! The expedition is all ready! The missionaries will come, will come—if only I give the word!"

"Why must you give the word?" I gasped. But just at that moment the radio, bursting into action, uttered deep-pitched series of Martian phrases. And Rand turned to his note-book, and began to scribble with frantic haste.

Even as he took down the words, he translated them in excited tones for my benefit.

"Our earthly brothers, the expedition is ready! We will go to you in your need, and elevate you to Martian standards! We will wipe out all earth-made laws, and replace them by Martian codes; we will rule you for your own good. At last, our earthly brothers, you will rise above the barbarism that has engulfed you!

"But before we can come to your aid, we need some assistance from you. We must know the exact chemical composition and density of your atmosphere, so that we may adjust ourselves to it; we must be directed to some flat and open stretch of

land, so that we may not fall into the sea or be lost among the high mountains. Tell us these things, O, our earthly friends, and twenty thousand missionaries shall set out this very day!"

THE message stopped short. Rand, flinging down his pencil, sat mopping his hair in the manner of one gone mad. "Shall I tell them?" he kept repeating. "Shall I tell them? The temptation is so strong! They will come here, and will create a different world! There will be no more wars! No more social inequality! All will have plenty, all will tolerate their neighbors! But we will no longer be free then! Oh, shall I tell them?"

"Calm yourself, Dr. Rand!" I cried for the twentieth time, coming over to him and taking his arm. "Calm yourself! There is no reason for such agitation—"

Suddenly he seemed to get beyond control. "There is more than reason!" he shouted, leaping to his feet. "There is more than reason! I—I cannot take the chance! Let me—let me put the temptation away! Let me put it beyond me!"

As he uttered these words, he seized his note-book, and violently ripped it from cover to cover; then, with maniacal fury, tore it into scraps, and set a match to the ruins.

"Dr. Rand! Dr. Rand!" I yelled, darting forward and striving to deter him. "Dr. Rand, what are you doing? All your notes! All the messages from Mars! All—"

He did not seem to hear me. Like one filled with a lust of destruction, he was bent upon a still more disastrous work. Seizing a heavy steel rod from the laboratory table, he rushed like a madman toward the "televisor," and began to deal blow after heavy blow upon the delicate apparatus. Crash followed crash in bewildering succession; shattered glass and twisted steel fell in a rain of ruins to the floor; while I, standing helplessly by, cried out in horror and dismay, "Dr. Rand! Dr. Rand! Your invention! Your great invention! You are wrecking your invention! Stop, stop, Dr. Rand! Stop! Stop!"

But he would not stop. Still, with insensate frenzy, he beat and beat at the ruins, until soon nothing remained but a mass of splintered lenses and battered tubes and wires.

Then, all at once, every atom of energy seemed to leave his body. He sank wearily into a seat; the distracted look on his face gave way to one of utter listlessness; he sighed, and his voice was blank with despair as he moaned. "It is done, done, done! I had to do it! My inven-

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tion—ruined, ruined! It will never be given to the world! I had to do it. The Martians would have come and ruled us! Who was I to let the world be overturned? Better to destroy my invention!"

For a long while Rand sat moping by himself, uttering hardly a word, scarcely seeming to hear my distressed inquiries. But when at length he did arise, it was with a new calmness in his eyes, despite the pallor of his cheeks. His lips were firmly compressed; he bore the look of one who has safely mastered a storm; I could see that my fears for his sanity had been needless.

"Denison," he said, putting his hand gently on my shoulder, "let us forget what happened. It had to be—I feel that we have avoided a great danger. . . . What do you say to dining at the club tonight?"

As I accepted the invitation, and as, with shaking fingers, I took the cigarette he offered me, I had the feeling that he had performed a greater deed in destroying his invention than in creating it. Yet that mass of torn metal and broken glass, lying twisted and ghastly upon the floor, seemed to stare at me like a silent reproach, and I groaned inwardly to think that Rand's prodigious achievement should have perished before the world had had a chance to marvel and applaud.

THE END

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AM-22

And It Was Good

By A. EARLEY

Illustrated by ADKINS

A moving tale of a second chance for man—and for his maker.

WHEN she came back he looked at her and put down the piece of wood which he had been carving.

He always carved in anxious moments. Many years before he had been apprenticed to a carpenter. He still loved the smooth, creamy feel and the warm tang of a good piece of wood. Usually he whittled away at it until it suggested a design to work on. More often than not it turned out to be a face, rugged peasant features with the simple wisdom of age engraved on them, or the chubby whorls of a child dimpled



with delight. Today, he thought, it might make a tree heavy with fruit and the crown of leaves.

"He's decided to do it, then"? he said, and she nodded without looking at him. She did not want to see the pain in her son's eyes. He got up and stood beside her and put his arm round her shoulders.

"When"? he asked her softly, patiently.

"Right away".

"Did you ask him if he would let me go again instead"?

"I couldn't"! she said and pulled him to her. "I couldn't bear it again after what they did to you last time".

"Am I any the worse for it"? he smiled at her. "Besides, it was a long time ago and people have changed."

"You'd suffer and you'd be away for years", she said. "I couldn't go through that. Not again".

"Is he very sad about it"? he asked.

"You know how he is when he has to do a thing like that", she said. "He said you weren't to worry too much. I was to tell you he'd like to talk to you about it later. He might want you to go there for a short visit while it's on".

He went back to his whittling, but his mind was busy with other things and the tree would not take shape.

SPRING had been late before. As the *Times* pointed out, there had been snow as late as mid-May in 1569 and at the end of April in 1782, yet the chronicles recorded bumper crops for both years. Agricultural experts advised closer pruning of fruit trees to speed budding, and an American firm of Artificial Fertilizer Manufacturers brought out a new product called 'Shoot-boost'. But the correspondence columns of the newspapers carried letters pointing out that, while spring might have been late before, this time the weather was entirely spring-like, yet still there was no sign of shoot, blossom or bud. Excessive radiation resulting from nuclear tests was blamed.

It was mid-May before the people and their governments became seriously alarmed. Trees still stood bare as in the depth of winter, lawns bore the bruising of last season's mowing but no new growth, flower beds showed the unbroken rills of after-seed raking. Farmers walked their fields day after day and crouched down to silhouette the furrows against the sky, the better to see the green whiskers when they sprouted. They prodded their heifers and ewes and went down to the villages to consult the vet. Their wives searched the hen-houses and put down extra grain and bricks of chalk.

The Pope's call to world-wide prayer and the British Government's announcement of the introduction of rationing fell on the same day. In most countries, the Pope's call found little response because the people were too busy lining up at food stores trying to lay in stocks. There were bread riots in Teheran.

RUMORS of a cattle disease began to circulate several days before official news of the full extent of the additional catastrophe was released. That night, the British Prime Minister spoke on the BBC. "With Her Majesty's consent", he said after reviewing the 'grave and disquieting situation', "I have given instructions for all available ships of the Royal Navy to put to sea immediately as an emergency fishing fleet". Meanwhile, he continued, divers and frogmen were asked to place their services at the disposal of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. They would be required to "glean nourishment for the nation from the laden larders of the deep". "Human ingenuity, skill and tenacity will conquer yet", he concluded. The Prime Minister's broadcast was followed by the announcement of emergency regulations for the disposal of dead cattle.

On 16th June, the President of the United States informed an Emergency Meeting of the Gen-

eral Assembly of the United Nations that Professor Braunweiler of Columbia University had perfected a method of extracting carbon sugar from wood. All suitable industrial plants throughout America were to be geared to the mass-production of the necessary equipment. The United States was prepared to supply the whole world with this equipment and with power-operated tree-felling implements on a lend-lease basis. Teams of instructors in the use of the equipment would be available to proceed to all parts of the world by the end of the month. The offer, which became known as USASAW, (USA SUGAR AID TO THE WORLD), was accepted with gratitude by all but the Soviet delegation.

Shortly after Sugar-Aid started, a Frenchman named Dr. Muller discovered, (in desperation, vineyards stood barren), that tree-sugar caused a fermentation in the still-plentiful needles of coniferous trees which, when distilled, resulted in a drink rich in alcohol and vitamins. He gave the drink the name 'BOIGNAC' in melancholy memory of happier days. Within six weeks, France had a surplus in the World Bank, and a French admiral was appointed to command the NATO Mediterranean fleet. Undoubtedly, boignac helped; yet, by the end of August, even that could not arrest the death rate.

ON 3rd September, a Soviet Task Force landed troops and armor at sixteen places along the East-African coast. Moscow Radio informed the world that 'the glorious forces of the USSR have taken this step under the personal command of Mr. Kruschchev to safeguard Africa's rich resources in animal life against the depredations of the Capitalist Warmongers'. Thus, the world was told, all peace-loving peoples would be assured an equitable and adequate supply of meat in the hard months to come.

At an Emergency Meeting of the NATO Council immediate counter-measures were agreed upon, but it was decided to confine retaliation to Africa and not to use nuclear weapons unless Russia did so first. The 'British Left', which had come into being after the Labor Party had split, withdrew from the House of Commons in protest, and the workers of the largest motor works in Italy assembled outside their long-closed factory to call for strike action.

By mid-December, the war in Africa had settled down to a stalemate. There was a good deal of patrolling; the opposing armies 'lived off the land', in other words on what game they could bag before the other side got it. Food-finding became more important than fighting, and hunger closed the eyes of higher

command to the proximity of the enemy, except of course when the enemy was engaged in tracking the same game. Reports from the front recorded these 'patrol skirmishes', and gave account of the really violent artillery duels. Loading and firing guns required less waning energy than infantry slogging in the heavy country. The fact that the wide no-man's-land between the opposing armies formed the main hunting-ground exposed friend and foe to the same gunfire. Casualties were consequently high. The Neutral Investigating Commission appointed after much vetoing by the United Nations—it consisted of delegates from Costa Rica, Kashmir and Monaco—found the situation rather confusing and withdrew to Cannes to consider its findings.

Early in January, a British scientist invented a Very-High-Frequency Lamp, regular exposure to which substituted a certain amount of the energy normally absorbed in food. The equipment was fantastically expensive to produce and was therefore available to very few people. A portable, cheaper and far less efficient model was mass-produced for the armed forces and essential workers. The dashing victories in Africa, forecast by enthusiastic politicians as a certain result of the new machine, did not however material-

ize. The new energy induced in picked units was expended in a redoubled quest for food. The papers reported increased patrol activity.

An agent planted by the Communists in the Ministry of Defense in London succeeded in photographing the plans of the ray-lamp. Within six weeks, a Russian version of the equipment reached the Red forces in Africa. As a result, the stalemate became staler still. Both sides began to lose control of their troops, which scattered over wide areas of Africa well outside the zone of battle; game had become scarce, and pursuit led both sides further and further afield.

ON a swampy peninsula, formed by a hairpin bend of a crocodile-infested river, a British and a French soldier had established their laager. They had joined forces to hunt for edible snakes, and a few hundred yards up-river one of them had trodden on a carelessly buried anti-personnel mine. The soggy ground had prevented the contraption from jumping as high as the designer had intended, and the dense, though leafless undergrowth had screened them from the worst of the blast.

They took it in turns to fetch water in their hats from the river and to bathe each other's wounds. Starving and feverish,

neither of them knew for certain when the stranger joined them. He was not in uniform; he spoke English and French so well that they both claimed him for a fellow-countryman. He did not enlighten them, and they did not persist in their questions. He insisted on nursing them and waiting on them. He fetched water for them from the river, and he put clay from the river bank on their septic wounds; he said it would heal them. The Englishman was embarrassed to see that the stranger had tears in his eyes while he did it. To pretend that he had not noticed, the Tommy talked about the flipping bastards who strew flipping mines all over the flipping place. The stranger smiled at that and said he would try to get them some fish from the river. He was away a long time, and when the Englishman crawled down to the river to see what had happened, he saw the stranger on his knees on the river bank. He wanted to shout that one could not catch flipping fish that flipping way, but then he changed his mind and crawled back to the Frenchman. The stranger turned up a little later with his hat full of fine fish. He wanted to light a fire to cook them, but the Frenchman pointed up to where shells from both sides were hissing over them, and they ate the fish raw. It tasted wonderful.

The stranger settled down to stay with them and brought fish and water as often as they felt hungry or thirsty. When he was not otherwise engaged, he used one of their bayonets to whittle away at pieces of wood. Their wounds were clearing up fast and did not hurt any more. The Frenchman insisted on giving the stranger his gascape to sleep in because he had nothing else, and the Tommy pulled out his only spare pair of socks because the stranger's were walked to shreds.

Sometimes the stranger left them for a few days, but he always made sure that they had enough water and fish before he left. He came back dusty and dirty and tired out, but he did not seem to need much sleep. Once, when the Tommy woke in the middle of the night and wanted a drink, he saw the stranger kneeling under a nearby tree. Flipping shell-shock, probably. Poor bastard.

THE Russian soldier stumbled into their laager one evening just as they were getting ready for sleep. He dropped his rifle in his surprise and then held his hands up high because the Frenchman was groping for his bayonet. They stood for a while looking at each other until the Frenchman put his weapon down and the Russian's arms fell slow-

ly to his sides. He watched them for a few minutes, then he saw a fishtail lying on the ground and picked it up and began to gnaw it. The Tommy glanced at his companions and crawled to the hole in the rocks behind them where they kept their supplies and gave the Russian a whole fish. The Russian grinned and took it, and while he was eating it he sat down and gradually wriggled his way closer to them. They showed him another fish and he said 'da' and they gave it to him. "First time I knew a flipping Ivan could say yes too", the Tommy said.

To their amazement, the stranger spoke to the Russian with the same ease with which he spoke English and French.

The Russian spent the night with them, and in the morning, after more fish, he wandered off. He came back dragging mounds of branches with which he built a shelter for the wounded men under one tree, and another one for the stranger. He grinned all over his broad face, pointed to the fish, to them, to himself and to the shelters. Then he shook hands all round.

That afternoon a Russian fighting patrol passed close by. The officer heard their voices, crept up behind them and threw a hand grenade among them. The stranger threw himself on top of it just as it went off. The

Englishman shot the officer through the head before the dust and smoke had cleared, and the remainder of the patrol withdrew.

WHEN they turned the stranger over, the ants were already swarming in his blood. At first they tried to brush them off with twigs, but more and more ants came. The Russian pointed to the river and gestured that it would be kindest to throw the body in. The Frenchman shook his head, and the Englishman started to drag the body to the hole in the rocks. They laid the stranger inside and rolled a rock against the entrance and sealed the gaps with clay.

They missed him a great deal. Not only because of the fish and water.

Next day the Russian left them. Before going, he banged them on the back and shook hands with them several times and tears left streaks on his dirty face.

SHE was overjoyed to have her son back with her. She could not stop looking at him for the sheer joy of it.

"Was it very terrible"? she asked.

"No", he smiled at her. "In a way it was wonderful".

"But the suffering and the killing", she said.

"I saw more than that", he said.

"Did you tell him all of it"? she asked.

"All of it". He picked up his knife and whittled away at the wood.

"And"? she insisted.

"He's angry, and sad. And, at the same time he's pleased", he said, and that was all he would tell her. But she felt comforted and she knew it was going to be all right.

He shaved the last of the bark of the wood and looked at the grain and set to work. This time it would be a child, with fat round cheeks and the dimples of laughter in them. **THE END**

EDITORIAL *(Continued from page 6)*

One, find something worthwhile to stand up for now (unlike the monkeys) besides unadulterated nationalisms and sheer power to overkill. Two, stop spending so much time looking for fruit in

the forest (or money in the marketplace) or, like the gorilla, we will not be able to see the woods for the trees. Three, be kind to any tree shrew you happen to meet. **NL**

Recidivism Preferred

By JOHN JAKES

Mellors was happy in Pineville—except for one problem. Why did he keep having that dream about a giant billboard that said only: "Acme Lead Works"?

RANDOLF Mellors ("rhymes with cellars," the newsmagazine *Tempis* in its cover story three weeks before declaring bankruptcy) was the world's greatest thief. His only difficulty as a subject for scrutiny here is that circumstances beyond his control had made him completely uninteresting. That is to say, dull.

But if you had asked the passengers in the long, mighty and black Excalibur Special Touring Saloon roaring down County Highway #2 one hellish hot day during state fair season whether Randolph Mellors was unworthy of study, all three, including that small, mummified, pink-scalped one in the immense tonneau, would have exchanged sly sneers which implied that if you thought Randolph Mellors was

dull, you just didn't understand the workings of free-wheeling capitalism.

Still, Randolph Mellors was a soulless hulk of his former con-niving self.

Oh, the looks were there. He had aged somewhat. The sleek hair was a trifle gray. But the willowy frame remained. And the inscrutable mouth, the long jaw, the cadaverous frame. But suavity is a difficult item to merchandise while selling turnip greens, baking soda, peanuts, baby bottle brushes and bunion remedies from behind a counter of pine planks in a crossroads store. Where oh where, was the Raffles-like glory of yesteryear?

Who cared? Certainly, not the inhabitants of Pineville. To them Randolph Mellors was only a slightly suspicious (because

strange) outlander who had come shuffling through the gum-trees one spring morning. An outlander who had gradually oriented himself to Pineville community life or what passed for it around eight shanties, two stores and a gas pump. He kept his mouth shut and made no mistakes when totalling up purchases in Larry Lumpkin's Emporium.

Larry Lumpkin liked to show dogs, hunt possum and play checkers. Hiring a clerk gave him the time, now he was getting along. (Of course that wasn't any accident either. His psychic readiness to employ a clerk had been thoroughly researched.)

But other than the relaxing Larry Lumpkin, who, in all honesty, cared a hang about Randolph Mellors? Certainly not Vinnie Mudgerock, for whom Randolph was just now wrapping up a bolt of muslin and a pack of disposable diapers. Outside on the pine sidewalk Vinnie Mudgerock's wee month-old infant reposed in a broken-down perambulator, sucking eagerly on a nutritionally deficient peppermint stick.

"That be all, Miz Mudgerock?" inquired Randolph, wiping his hands on his apron. Randolph had always been a consummate actor. In Pineville he had managed to acquire a trace

of the local dialect, which demonstrated conclusively that no matter how hard bureaucracy tried, bureaucracy could not win every hand. (As the three assorted inhabitants of the Excalibur Special Touring Saloon, a quarter of a mile out of town now, engine snarling, were hell-bent to prove.)

When Miz Mudgerock said that would be all, Randolph said, "Leave me carry this bundle out to the car for you."

"Why, thank you, Mr. Mellors." Miz Mudgerock gave him a yeasty smile.

RANDOLF Mellors, of course, found it impossible to smile. He did not know why. He also had a violent dislike of anyone who looked at him straight in the eye. He did not know why about this either, except that it made him want to start running. Further, he had periodic dreams in which he saw only one thing, a vast signboard in the rain, painted with three-foot letters reading:

Acme Lead Works.

Even including these three idiosyncrasies, however, the dullness of Randolph Mellors was reasonably total.

Distantly down County Highway #2 boiled fuming clouds of tan dust. Pineville dozed. The sky stretched blue and bright all the way to the state fair-

Illustrated by ADKINS



grounds where Larry Lumpkin was doubtless engaged right now in a checker game, having left Randolph to mind the store. Randolph put the paper sack into the rear seat of Miz Mudgerock's dust-yellow flivver. Then he walked over to where the lady was picking up her infant from amongst gooey blankets.

While burping the smeared tot, Miz Mudgerock's mouth dropped open.

"Why, Mr. Mellors, you have the funniest look on your face."

"I do?" said a surprised Randolph.

"You sure do. What you lookin' at? That silly ole candy stick?"

"I guess I was," said Randolph, suddenly extremely nervous.

"You hongry or suthin? You looked like you wanted to chew up that ole peppermint stick just to bits."

"Hon . . . uh, hungry? No, er, not in the least." With a real feeling of terror Randolph Mellors said, most truthfully, "I loathe. . . er . . . don't like candy."

"You *are* a puzzler," said Miz Mudgerock. "Where'd you ever come from, to a place like this, anyhow?"

"Up north," Randolph, mortally terrified now. It was the best answer he could give, considering he didn't know the correct one.

The roar of the Excalibur Saloon grew thunderous. The dust cloud bloomed. A yellow hound narrowly avoided being jellied beneath the tires of the highway monster. Randolph Mellors wiped his hands furiously on his apron, as though he'd done something unsanitary. A view of the Acme Lead Works sign flashed on and off in his head, for no apparent reason.

"Excuse me, Miz Mudgerock."

He quivered and plunged like a scared hare back into the crackery gloom of Larry Lumpkin's store. He stood with his back to the fly-specked plate glass in the diffused sunlight which filtered through it until he heard the fliver putt off up into the rolling hills. Once again he was face to face with the dreadful enigma of himself. The sensation was akin to staring at a newly wiped blackboard of the dimensions of the Great Wall of China. Only the deafening peal of Larry Lumpkin's jangling store bell prevented Randolph from plunging further into a morass of futile introspection.

THE TRIO from the Excalibur Special Touring Saloon were certainly a sight.

The first tapped one mummified spat-clad foot and peered at Randolph from out small ratty eyes. The old gentleman wore

an old-fashioned high collar and eye glasses on a black string, plus a pin stripe suit which even Randolph Mellors—somehow—knew was out of style. The small old gentleman's companions, however, were startling studies in what could either be termed the seedy or the raffish. Or worse.

There was a fat one, three hundred pounds, in a suit the size of a tent, that sported egg stains on its lapels. He had a tangled brown beard the size of a spade and a mass of wooly brown hair to match. His novelty was further heightened by the suggestion of alien life within this hairy mass.

His companion, an epicene youth hardly old enough to vote but possessing a head too big for the rest of him, appeared to stare inside himself, if that were possible, from behind like plate glass window spectacles. He looked as though he might unveil a hatchet from somewhere within his obviously rented chauffeur's uniform and go totally berserk any minute.

The little old mummy advanced. He studied the store, but had no time to speak before the behemoth with the brown beard pulled a whisky flask from his pocket, tilting back his head, and proceeding to pour booze down his throat while orgiastic shudders seized him.

With surprising agility old mummyface danced across the store and slapped the flask out of the fat man's hands.

"All right, Dr. Kloog, that is sufficient. I warned you."

"But—my God—" gasped Dr. Kloog. "Seven hundred miles cold turkey. Banner, you fiend, I've got to have a drink—"

"Which do you need most?" hissed mummyface. "Hooch or a paycheck?"

"Someday," Kloog threatened, "someday some college'll take me back and—(belch)." Dr. Kloog lowered his bovine head. "You win."

The cretinish prodigy in chauffeur's garb sniggered at his companion's expense. The little man addressed as Banner spun around on one of his patent leather toes and pointed a finger.

"As for you, Dr. Rumsgate, you're no better off than he is."

"It's just that the attitudes on vivisection in this country—" purred Dr. Rumsgate.

"That," said Banner with steel in his tone, "will be all."

Returning toward the counter and making a gesture which included the stupefied Mellors, he continued, "If you gentlemen will bear in mind that we're in a public place, and stop making exhibitions of yourselves, I'll proceed with my purchase." Glancing up at the shelves, he

said, "Good morning, sir. I wonder if you could tell me how far it is to the state capital."

"State capital?" Randolph repeated. "That's a hundred miles west."

"Dear me," said Banner. "A wrong turn. I wonder, could you sell me a pack of cigarettes? Do you have Status? Ivory-tipped, if you please."

"No Status, no, sir," said Randolph, running his eyes over the shelves. "How about Board Chairmans? Wolfbaits? Big Cit-ies? Sexos?"

"A pack of Board Chairmans will do." Randolph handed him the brightly lithographed cardboard container, accepted the twenty dollar bill without taking his eyes off the register, rang the sale and held out the change. Randolph blinked. Banner had already broken open his pack, turned his back, and was passing out the door, lighting a Board Chairman while his two flunkies flanked him.

Randolf stared for ten seconds at the nineteen dollars and fifty cents resting in his palm. The Acme Lead Works flashed behind his eyes, three feet high in the rain. Suddenly Randolph felt as though a sledge had knocked him in the head.

He ran from behind the counter and shouted, "Excuse me sir, but you forgot your change."

THE expression on the mummified face of the little old man as he turned back into the store was maniacal. For a long moment he seemed frozen in a beam of sunlight, giggling and leering at his two scientific mates. He nudged each one in the ribs. Dr. Kloog snuffled like an elephant about to charge. Dr. Rumsgate rolled his eyes. Somewhere within Banner's shrunken ribcage a peculiar sound was building, a sound of crackling paper that passed for hysterical mirth. It came bursting from his scissors lips and he began to caper up and down.

"He's the one," Banner cackled. "Oh, mercy, yes, he is the one."

"Don't let's waste time," said Dr. Rumsgate, as though sadistically titillated.

"Grab him," said Dr. Kloog in a pant.

"Wait a minute, gentlemen—" Randolph began. "You're making a mistake—"

Dr. Kloog, Dr. Rumsgate and Banner, all three, looked Randolph straight in the eye.

Something wild, like a whip, cracked in Randolph's head. He put one hand on the counter and vaulted.

He came down like a cat on the balls of its feet, perfectly poised, as though going off balconies and second stories were old stuff. One lithe hand whipped

out. A silver gleam caught sunlight. Randolph crouched in the shadows near the magazine rack. He made small wicked circles in the air with the blade of the carving knife he'd ripped from a faded point of sale card.

"Stay back! I—I don't want any part of you three."

Dr. Rumsgate sniggered. "Automatic reaction. Partial breakthrough."

"Weak conditioning," nodded Dr. Kloog. "It'll be a cinch."

"Ah, God, to have the chance again," exclaimed Rumsgate, "after being de-licensed—"

"Keep quiet!" Banner snarled. They did. Banner tried to assume an ingratiating air before the tigerish man crouching beside a display of the July issue of *Hollywood Love Thrills and Confessions*. "My dear Mr. Mellors—"

"How do you know my name?"

"Never mind, Mr. Mellors, we know it. I want to assure you that—"

"Get out of this store before I do some carving."

"You're being extremely uncooperative. If you only knew—"

"Leave me alone," Randolph shouted suddenly, an odd, desperate sort of pleading note in his voice. Almost like a child he yelled, "I haven't done anything!"

"But my dear man," shrieked Banner, "that is precisely the trouble."

"Get him!" exclaimed Dr. Kloog, and launched himself through space.

THE ambition of Dr. Kloog was considerably more elevated than his trajectory. One supple spring to the top of a cracker barrel by Randolph and Dr. Kloog found himself tangled in the magazine rack, *Hollywood Love Thrills and Confessions* raining down upon him in profusion. Dr. Rumsgate, apparently had an aversion for the physical. He hopped back and forth from one foot to the other, clapping his palms together as if he could not contain his excitement. Banner couldn't contain his excitement either, except that it achieved a somewhat more lethal nature. Its release took the form of curses, then physical blows rained upon the persons of the two scientists. By that time Randolph Mellors, raising his forearms to shield his head, had gone through the plate glass window of Larry Lumpkin's Emporium in one magnificent crashing leap.

"Oh, you wretched bunglers —!" Banner howled.

A smooth muffled roar filled the store. The gas pump disappeared in a cloud of saffron dust. The Excalibur Special Touring Saloon began to weave up County Highway # 2 at something near seventy, its course a continuous S-curve, as though a mortally

terrified man were at the wheel. Which happened to be the case.

Dr. Kloog, peering through the fractured shards of glass, did a double take and caught hold of Banner's arm.

"Banner, hang on. Banner, don't punch me that way. He took the bus."

"—vile, unspeakable, bungling, wretched—"

"Ah, ah!" shrieked Dr. Rums-gate. "Yes, yes. Banner, the remote, the remote!"

"—unprintable, censorable, bowdlerized *fools*, you'll never—"

Banner's eye blink rate suddenly accelerated. His breath hissed between his two thousand dollar New York City teeth. Then he let out a queer little chuckle.

"The remote! Why, of course! Poor Mellors. Been out of the city too long." From the inner breast pocket of his suit, he pulled a small electronic pack housed in plastic and covered with knobs, similar to the units used in a less advanced day to tune televisions across a room.

UNAWARE of the manipulations about to be committed, Randolph Mellors drove like hell over, around and through the execrable chuckholes and corduroy strips of the county road. Behind him a volcano of dust obscured the crossroads in the mirror, which was just as well. The horrid vision of staring eyes in

the store's musky interior haunted him and brought unbearably cold sweat to every point on his body.

Next to him on the seat shone the fierce, naked brightness of the carving knife. Glancing at it, Randolph experienced a mysterious shudder of revulsion. He quickly rolled down the Excalibur's side window, steered with one hand and flung the weapon off into the pines.

A moment later he wondered just why he had thrown away his only means of defense.

His wonderment was transitory. The window began to roll itself up.

Randolf tried to crank it down manually. No go. He felt the Excalibur Special Touring Saloon begin to decelerate. He crushed the floor pedal all the way down. He swung the steering wheel in a full circle. It did not object. The Saloon, however, was now running in a perfectly straight line, corduroy and all, at slightly less than thirty miles per hour.

Next thing Randolph knew, the car nosed itself into a side road, threw itself into reverse and started to cruise placidly straight back toward the crossroads where three figures and a gas pump stood waiting.

Randolf flung himself to the other side of the car. But every exit including those in the tonneau, had been remotely locked.

Helpless, sweat popping out all over his face, Randolph sat under the wheel and watched like a man hypnotized as the Touring Saloon rolled inexorably back to Lumpkin's store.

The brakes gave a faint squeak as it stopped in the dust. The three strangers surrounded the vehicle, whose doors now popped unlocked. Banner opened the one on the driver's side. He motioned in a most gentlemanly way for Randolph to climb out.

Terrified, Randolph asked: "What—what—please tell me what I've done."

"Nothing," said Banner, false teeth gleaming. "You're an unfortunate victim."

"The process," rumbled Dr. Kloog as he rummaged in the tonneau, "is called Socialization. You're social, that's all. Now where are my instruments?"

"Actually," came the voice of Dr. Rumsgate, from somewhere behind Mellors, "you'll really thank us after we—"

After? After what?

After the gleaming needle slid into the musculature of his shoulderblade, which was after he screwed his head around to stare at Dr. Rumsgate, who had sneaked up on him by opening the door directly to the rear of the driver's seat. Now Randolph's horrified gaze locked with the slightly mad eyes behind the window glass of spectacles. Ran-

dolf felt himself consumed by that gaze, swallowed by it. He tried to crawl from the vehicle. Somehow or other that devil Rumsgate had injected simple syrup into his veins.

And the simple syrup was spreading. His legs turned into it. Then his arms. When he tried to move, flee, escape, all he could do was ooze. He had no power left.

Most amazingly, it was raining inside the Excalibur Special Touring Saloon. Raining on Dr. Rumsgate's big head.

No, Randolph thought to himself, bemused now, gripped by a pleasant twilight lassitude, he doesn't have a head at all. On Rumsgate's shoulders sat the sign over the main gate of the Acme Lead Works, the Acme Lead Works in the rain in September . . .

In Septe . . .

In Septem . . .

September!

IT BURST from the back of the whirl of his mind: *September.*

Seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars stashed in a three-wheel icecream truck labelled Yum-O FreezieTreats.

Pedalling away down the rainy road . . .

Ding-a-linging his bell in triumph.

Roadblock.

Federal men.

Vendor back from vacation,
but too late, tri-wheeler stolen,
too late to alter plan . . .

Worked anyway . . .

Greatest coup . . .

Until . . .

Pedalling, pedalling . . .

No reverse gears on Freezie-

Treats wagons . . .

Manacles . . .

Dark rooms . . .

Guilt, shouting guilt:

Yes (Randolf heard himself
crying in that rainy September
in the darkness of his mind) *yes,*
you sons of satan, I foxed you
again!

Too bad (whispered ghost voices).
Too bad. So colorful.

One of the last (went the whispering
voices blowing through his dimming
head). *The last, the last, the last.*
The last of the great.

Penological triumph (keened a
ghost-choir). *Break down the walls.*
Rebuild the personality. Disassociate.
Assimilate. Integrate.

SOCIALIZE.

—reporting from geographical
selector, chief (CHIEFCHIEF-
CHIEFCHIEF went the dark black
echo down the fast-failing electrical
paths of his reworked, muddled,
tired head) *and we find* (FINDFINDFINDFIND) *ideal—re-*
adjustment—environment—Pine
(PINEPINEPINEPINE)—

For one virtually unbearable
fraction of time Randolf Mellors
stared again into the looming

erudite eyes of the psychosocial-
izer who had leaned over him in
a room tiled in green and lowered
the face mask for the submerging.

The eyes . . . *the eyes* . . .

Guilt.

Guilt.

GUILT!

They just couldn't make the
eyes benevolent. Writhing (they
had strapped him, he remembered
in a roman candle burst of remembering)
he saw the eyes blaze guilt which
already, as the hormones and the
enzymes and the catalyzers bubbled
through him in the first moments of
social metamorphosis, already he had
come to loathe.

Guilt; he loathed guilt.

But you sonsofbitches (he shrieked
before they gassed him all the way
into being somebody else entirely)
you're making me so damn dull
(LL . . . LL . . . LL) . . .

AT sundown, a great red sun-
down suggestive of far places
waiting beyond the pine hills,
the Excalibur Special Touring
Saloon was parked on a bluff
overlooking Lumpkin's cross-
roads store, but concealed behind
a sufficient quantity of trees so
that observation could be carried
on discreetly. A panel in the
rear fin had been opened, from
which a spring steel trellis shot
forth a powerful optical tube.

Through this instrument Harlow B. C. Banner was now observing the interior of the store.

Distantly through the still, crisp air came the putt of a flivver. Banner clicked his false teeth in exultation.

"What's he doing now?" asked Dr. Kloog. In point of fact, Dr. Kloog actually said, "Wuzzydoo-now?", as a result of the reward given him by Banner following the surreptitious re-direction of personality that took four hours. This reward was a fifth of premium Scotch whisky. Insatiable and triumphant, Dr. Kloog had also consumed a pint of rubbing alcohol out of the medical supplies. He was even now suggestively eyeing the tin of canned heat bubbling over which their dinner cooked.

"Writing a note." Chuckling, Banner screwed the lens adjustment so that he could peer more effectively inside Lumpkin's. "Wait, I'll be able to read in a minute—"

"Delicious," came the piping cry of Dr. Rumsgate somewhere within the tonneau of the vehicle. Dr. Rumsgate had not bothered to convert the tonneau back from an electronic operating pad into conventional seats. In fact it was his particular reward to be able to leave the pad up a while, and conduct some sort of procedure which Banner didn't care to inquire about.

"Just as I thought!" Banner exclaimed. "He's writing a fare well note to Lumpkin. Now he's coming out. Locking the store, and—oh-oh. Car pulling up. Blasted woman. Getting her buggy out, too."

"Bassids," belched Dr. Kloog, in reference to his former faculty colleagues. He gestured flamboyantly with his empty pint of spirits. "All bassids. Jus' because man geds de-licen don' mean he don' know how 'just personality . . ."

"Don't pat yourself on the back," sneered Banner, furiously adjusting the eyepiece. "He was easy. After all, he had strong anti-social drives."

"Has," Kloog corrected with several lurches. "Z goddam bag."

Banner refused to pay further attention to his disreputable comrades. The scene captured within the circle of the lens fascinated him. Randolph Mellors had emerged from Lumpkin's Emporium just as Miz Mudgerock wheeled her perambulator up the sidewalk and kicked on the foot-brake. Mellors was standing in the winy red sunlight, one thumb hooked rakishly in his belt, his other index finger through the eyelet of his coat, the coat over his shoulder.

Whatever the woman desired in the store, Mellors told her to get it herself, with an insolent

jerk of his thumb. She scuttled out of sight. Glancing in all directions, Randolph Mellors leaned over the pram. In a twinkling he darted back popping half a peppermint stick into his mouth.

EVEN from high on the bluff Harlow B. C. Banner could hear a faint squall of protest. Mellors stepped off the sidewalk into the dust. He turned beside the gas pump and thumbed his nose at Lumpkin's. Then, swinging his coat and whistling, he walked up County Highway #2 into the sunset.

"He *smiled!*" Banner shrieked joyfully. "He actually *smiled!* Ah, in a month, maybe less, the crimes—the delicious crimes."

Banner snapped his fingers.

"All right, Kloog, Rumsgate—pack up! On to the next town.

We've got that sex degenerate. I'll teach those bureaucrats!" Righteously, Banner shook his fist at the reddening pines. "Try to stamp out crime, will they? Try to adjust criminals into goodie-goodies, will they? Illegal or not, I'll show them they can't tamper with free enterprise—destroy what I built!"

"Wunnerful," said Dr. Kloog. "Wunnerful for me, wunnerful for you."

"You bet it's wonderful!" cried the little old mummy. "After ten years of bureaucracy—near bankruptcy—" He clamped hands on the oversized Kloog and his whole larcenous face was illumined. "—finally, *finally*, Banner Newspapers will once again have some news that's fit to print!"

THE END



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THE SPECTROSCOPE

By S. E. COTTS

The Infinite Moment. By John Wyndham. 159 pp. Ballantine Books. Paper: 35¢.

At the risk of starting a "letter column war" on the subject, let me say that I have always preferred stories dealing with Time rather than those whose setting is Space. The elusiveness of time has always been a stronger stimulant to my imagination and so (because I'm human and therefore unavoidably subjective to some degree, even though I'm a critic) I have always been more tolerant of the not wholly successful time story than the same quality space one. Knowing my weakness so well, I thought this newest volume by John Wyndham was practically tailor-made for me. Called *The Infinite Moment*, it features six stories whose common element is time: specifically, that strange moment when we meet ourselves or someone we know in the past or future.

Unfortunately, even my tolerance for this theme is not enough

to carry the day this time. Mr. Wyndham's work has always been many-faceted: from the satire of *The Midwich Cuckoos* to the bold, consistent vision developed in *Re-Birth*. There is hardly a trace of this versatility in *The Infinite Moment*. Certainly, even discounting my weakness for time stories, there are few ideas capable of being so endlessly manipulated. Yet story succeeds story with barely a trace of variety, so that by the third, one can already guess not only what is going to happen, but more or less how it's going to be introduced. Very tedious!

The only exception to the above remarks is the first story, a more extended one of some sixty-five pages. But this, also, is not successful, though for a different reason. Almost too much is packed within its pages. The author could have eliminated the time gimmick at the beginning and the end and had a solid idea for a whole novel.

To catalogue a few of the samenesses that plague the other stories: no one ever gets stranded in time, or returned to the wrong time; all the characters seem to get into these situations in a similar manner, i.e., an accident or an experiment; except for the last story which is faintly humorous, the stories are extremely wordy in an English-upper - class - drawing - room-play kind of way; considering the deep emotional upheavals that must occur in a time change, even one of only 20 or 30 years, the characters are very much on the surface with rag doll feelings. The similarity even extends to the words and actions of the people who have been transported. They all think they must be dreaming, then they look in mirrors or at newspapers for confirmation, then they pinch themselves; two or three of them even spout the identical words that "no dream ever finished anything with that amount of detail."

With all this said, it is a relief to be able to report that this month also saw the publication of another Ballantine Book: a reprint of one of Mr. Wyndham's more famous novels (and justly so), *Out of the Deepes*.

Three Hearts and Three Lions. *By Poul Anderson. 191 pp. Doubleday & Company, Inc. \$2.95.*

Though this novel is by one of science fiction's staunchest supporters, don't pick it up expecting a regular science fiction story. It is far more like a folk epic or saga of the Beowulf genre. The hero, Holger Carlsen, is fighting the Germans with other members of the Danish underground when all of a sudden he finds himself back in the Carolingian era—except, of course, he doesn't realize what era it is at the time. When he does, he begins to see that the battles he must wage then and the one he had been waging in the twentieth century are both part of the same big battle, that of Law against Chaos. Eventually he is returned to the present in the same unexplainable fashion as he left it, but not before his adventures involve him with witches, dwarfs, beautiful maidens in distress, etc. The whole process is quite a lot of fun, but so perfectly does Anderson submerge himself in the style that it almost seems like a parody of an epic. And I, for one, don't believe that was his intent.

Tomorrow and Tomorrow. *By Hunt Collins. 190 pp. Pyramid Books. Paper: 35¢.*

Tomorrow and Tomorrow is billed as a "battle of strange cults for control of the world." Actually it is a bona fide battle, but the business of strange cults

is strictly wishful thinking on behalf of the publishers. It is based partly on trends that can be seen around any city and partly on ideas that smack of *Brave New World*.

Most of Mr. Collins' world is divided into two philosophies or ways of life: they are the Vicarions (recently come to power when the book opens) and the Realists (who attempt by fair means and foul to get the power back in their own hands again). As one can guess from the labels, the Vicarions have, in varying degrees, withdrawn from reality into a world of make-believe, while the Realists rush to embrace life. Anyway this is what the book tells us, and here is the root of the confusion. For the conversations, actions, and mode of living attributed to each side don't fit into these arbitrary niches. One can understand the Vicarions drug addiction and love of *Senso* entertainment which require no effort on the part of the individual—these things fit. But why should they be as shrewd in business matters as the hero, Van Brant, or wear such sensually exciting clothes and made up bosoms as all the women do? Are these really the actions of those who flee reality? And the Realists, on the other hand—one can understand their having batches of children, but why should their

women wear clothes down to the ankles and be restrictingly brasiered and girdled? As I said, things are annoyingly fuzzy around the edges. It is rather like waking up to find that a Republican means someone who believes in government subsidies and a Democrat means someone who is anti-welfare.

This is too bad because Hunt Collins can write a fast-paced story and I'm more than willing to have him try again, but first I wish he'd decide who's who.

The Day They H-Bombed Los Angeles. By Robert Moore Williams. 128 pp. Ace Books. Paper: 35¢.

What must surely be one of the leading contenders for the Booby Prize of the year (or even the decade) is this book from Ace. I didn't think that even "the bottom of the barrel" could be this bad. Written in a style that would surely fail a high school composition class, the novel attempts to bring us a thrilling drama of why the U.S.A. all but destroyed one of its own cities. Certainly the subject by itself has enough drama for the poorest writer to turn to some advantage. But Mr. Williams' own description of his writing habits is far from promising. He says, in a brief biographical resume, that words flow out of him and "there is nothing I can do

about this except direct them at a typewriter and hope they will emerge in the form of stories or books." Although I'm a firm believer in the efficacy of hope, I certainly don't think it has the power to make a "silk purse out of a sow's ear," or a novel out of aimless words.

SPECTROSCOPE NOTES:

There is an old saying, "Don't judge a book by its cover." We commend this proverb to the attention of all regular purchasers of science-fiction books. It applies to a recent Ace novel called *This World is Taboo* by Murray Leinster. Don't buy it unless you're willing to do so with the full knowledge that, as a regular reader of AMAZING, you have already read it under the title, *Pariah Planet*. Take our word for it—the changes Ace has made, except for the title, couldn't be detected even with radar. AMAZING feels very strongly about this matter of misrepresentation. When we use a novel that will soon come out in book form, we try to ascertain what the new title will be and acknowledge same. We feel that this is a standard to which others, in all honesty, should adhere.

A second note of interest deserves mention this month. Hard on the heels of my review of *Skyport*, by Curt Siodmak, the story

of the first space hotel, I attended the Design and Decoration Show at the 7th Regiment Armory in New York. There I came across a room designed for a space hotel complete with an attempted explanation of the problems of interiors in outer space. Featured were such things as a "floating bed and an exercising bicycle.

The diehards may still hold that science-fiction is for fools, but indications like this prove that the FBI could take lessons in subtle infiltration.

RECENT worthy classic releases include:

So Close to Home. By James Blish. 142 pp. Ballantine. Paper: 35¢.

The Other Passenger. By John Keir Cross. 159 pp. Ballantine. Paper: 35¢.

Galactic Derelict. By Andre Norton. 192 pp. Ace. Paper: 35¢.

Storm over Warlock. By Andre Norton. 192 pp. Ace. Paper: 40¢.

Master of the World. By Jules Verne. 254 pp. Ace. Paper: 35¢.

Slan. By A. E. van Vogt. 159 pp. Ballantine. Paper: 35¢.

The Best from Fantasy and Science Fiction (Fifth Series). Edited by Anthony Boucher. 253 pp. Ace. Paper: 40¢.

The War of the Worlds and The Time Machine. By H. G. Wells. 276 pp. A Dolphin Book (Double-day). Paper: 95¢.

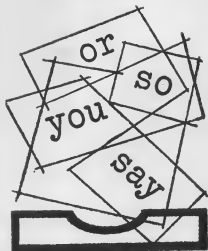
Dear Editor:

I have been reading AMAZING since 1937 and FANTASTIC for quite a number of years and as a few thoughts have been stewing in my mind about them for some time I thought I would take the liberty of writing to you.

Your covers are, on the whole, very good. September's for both magazines were superb.

I buy a magazine for these reasons: 1) letter column; 2) book reviews; 3) the stories; 4) editorial. The profiles in AMAZING are very interesting, if incomplete. I think you should give some space to fanzine reviews. I want to subscribe to many fanzines but do not know how to contact the editors. I want to buy American books but can't contact the people who have them. It was through the letter column of FANTASTIC that I contacted the editor of *Mirage* (a very nice chap he is) and I feel that the fanzines would keep alive interest until the next monthly issue of the prozine rolls up. Through reading the letter columns one has the feeling of belonging to a world wide club and this breeds affection for the magazine. The editor's comments after the letters are important too—giving the accolade when deserved, and the gentle or pointed rebuke to the over presumption.

Classic reprints: can I have



some of the eldritch tales of Seabury Quinn, please? He wrote scores of tales of ancient sorcery but has never had a book printed and nobody reprints him. He is not as good as Lovecraft, but although he wrote far more his stories are very hard to come by. (Yes, I have the Avon Fantasy Readers). I think fantasy reprints better than sf which does tend to be dated. Consider "The Morrison Monument," by Murray Leinster, written in 1935—a darn good tale—until we come to the line "They may have cracked the atom in ten thousand years." I also agree with the "Literary cove from Providence" that, "The human like aspect, psychology and proper names commonly attributed to other-planetarians by the bulk of cheap

authors is at once hilarious and pathetic." On a strange world there should be an "utter incomprehensible strangeness." You should not step out of your space ship to be greeted (possibly telepathically) by a human-like creature in a language you can understand.

C. R. Kearns

35 Burniston Road,
Hull Yorks., England

● *In lieu of a fanzine review column we hope the appearance of this letter will put you in touch with all the fanzine editors you can handle. For the purchase of American books you'll find the classified pages helpful.*

Dear Editor:

After reading a few stories by Jack Vance, not only in your magazine, but also in others, I noticed a similarity in style between him and the late Henry Kuttner. Also, while reading a paragraph in my limited study of science fiction, I found out that Henry Kuttner did use the pseudonym of Jack Vance. Are these two the same person, and if so, how come there are still new stories of Henry Kuttner?

While I'm at it, I might as well give you a few compliments. Since picking up your September '60 issue, I haven't been able to resist the temptation; I've got every issue you've published

since. There's no other magazine that I've been able to find that has as many good stories as you. As for the serials, I'm completely for them.

Only one thing: In comparison to other magazines of the field with equal number, or less number, of pages you get less stories in. How come?

Stephen Petroschek
558 W. Hazel Ave.
Lima, Ohio

● *Answer 1: Jack Vance is Jack Vance, himself, in the flesh. Kuttner never used this as a pen name. The source from which you got such information was in error. Answer 2: We run longer stories.*

Dear Editor:

"Counter-Psych" in the November issue of AMAZING STORIES was beyond a doubt one of the finest mystery stories I've ever seen. I don't read mysteries much, but so far as I'm concerned, this was a good one.

At first, I thought it might be a science fiction story, because after all, it did appear in a sf magazine, and the hero was a "science" reporter.

However, as I read it, I soon realized it really was a mystery story. It had all the elements—the snoopy reporter who never quite gets around to writing his assignments for his apoplectic

boss—several fine scenes in which he gets bopped on the head or shot at (the descriptions rivaled Spillane at his best)—a beautiful girl photographer named Friday (charming name, that)—two or three murders—and of course, the suspenseful overhanging problem of just *what* in hell is the eccentric old professor trying to do?

I was held in suspense as I read, hoping desperately that someone would succeed in killing the hero, but it never worked out.

I kept waiting for him to “set fire to a cigarette”, or “pour a slug of firewater” into his gullet, but this never happened either. I’m sure this was just an oversight—as fine a mystery writer as Mr. Maine would have put these things in if he’d thought of it.

At any rate, it *was* a mystery story dressed up in some pseudo-scientific clothes—sort of a literary transvestite, you might say.

Incidentally, can you tell me where I can pick up some good science fiction?

I don’t really care much for mystery stories.

Gary Greenman
Chicago, Ill

PS. Don’t mind my kidding. AMAZING is a good magazine for my money, and I fully intend to continue spending my money on it every month. “Hystereo” and

“Meteor Strike!” were excellent sf, and I’d like to see more like them.

But *please please please* don’t run any more pretend-sf like “Counter-Psych”!

● *We understand there’s some great SF buried in the old files of an extinct magazine named Ten Detective Aces*

Dear Editor:

I have just put the sheep to bed at sundown, fed the dog, stepped into the sheep wagon, lit a fire and put on a pot of beans to boil.

Then, of course, I grabbed the latest copy of AMAZING STORIES magazine (November ish) and opened it up, started to read the fact story “Colony on the Moon” by Frank Tinsley, read to exactly 24 words on page 136, and threw the old favorite of mine at the dog. (nameless, but usually ‘Mutt’).

A day on the moon is *not* 29½ days long. Please correct this mistake and be kind to my dog. He doesn’t deserve such punishment, and does not understand these sudden attacks of frustrated rage from his two-legged servant. Also it could be hard on a usually good mag.

The moon day is a little over 24 hours long. The sun rises and sets on every portion of the moon in this length of time, just as it

does in the conventional earth day, on most of earth.

Proof: One side of the moon is always away from the earth; never visible and never seen from earth. As it rotates toward the sun, that unseen side is bathed in the sun's rays; as it goes to the opposite, or night side of the earth, that unseen side is still away from us. We have night, and the lunatics also have night.

Sorry I can't give you the ex-

act length of the moon day, but research facilities here are limited to a few old sf magazines and some old newspapers. I could estimate it, but I can't find a pencil to figger with.

Edward R. Sutton
939 Glenarm
Casper, Wyoming

● *Your research facilities aren't that limited; why don't you check with the sheep?*



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